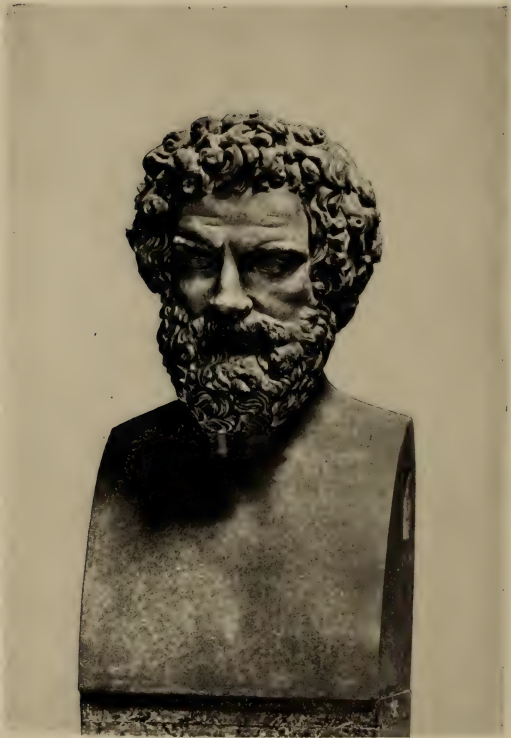




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SOPHOCLES



Sophocles.

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SOPHOCLES

P5X
1914

TRAGEDIES
AND
FRAGMENTS

Translated by the late
E. H. PLUMPTRE D.D.
Dean of Wells

WITH NOTES RHYMED
CHORAL ODES AND
LYRICAL DIALOGUES

IN TWO VOLUMES
VOL I

BOSTON U.S.A.
D. C. HEATH & CO., PUBLISHERS

1914

THE UNIVERSITY OF
UTAH
PROVO, UTAH

TO
CONNOP THIRLWALL, D.D.

LORD BISHOP OF ST. DAVID'S,

AND

TO THE MEMORY OF
JULIUS CHARLES HARE, M.A.

FRIENDS in your boyhood, when the dawn was bright,
Friends in the heat and burden of the day,
Friends even yet, though one has passed away
To join the children of the Lord of Light!
Long since ye roamed each vale, and climbed each height.
Where songs of Hellas float through golden grove,
Or from the hill of Capitolian Jove,
Tracked the young stream of Rome's imperial might.
Our friend and brother heareth loftier praise ;
But thou, kind teacher, speakest to us still,
And wilt not scorn, scant offering though they be,
These echoes of high thoughts of ancient days.
Ah! would the power were equal with the will!
Would that my faltering speech were worthier thee!

LLANDILO, *August 29th, 1865.*

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The present edition of "Sophocles" is uniform with the late Dean Plumptre's translation of Æschylos. The text of the second edition, which was carefully revised by the translator, has been followed, and the Dean's annotations have been included.

In translating the Choral Odes the Dean used such unrhymed metres as seemed to him most analogous in their general rhythmical effect to those of the original, but in order to meet a freely expressed wish he added a rhymed version of the Choral Odes and chief lyrical dialogues in an appendix.

The brackets [] indicate lines which are looked upon by one or more critics of repute as spurious, and an asterisk () the more prominent passages in which the text is so uncertain, or the construction so difficult, that the rendering must be looked upon as, at best, somewhat doubtful. The numerals refer to the Greek text, not to the translation.*

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Uffizi Gallery, Florence

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CHRONOLOGICAL OUTLINE OF THE LIFE OF SOPHOCLES

B.C.

525 Birth of Æschylos.

510 Expulsion of the Peisistratidæ. Democratic constitution of Cleisthenes.

500 Birth of Anaxagoras.

499 Æschylos exhibits his first tragedy.

497 Death of Pythagoras (?)

495 Birth of Sophocles.

490 Battle of Marathon.

485 Xerxes succeeds Dareios.

484 Birth of Herodotos. Æschylos gains the prize in tragedy.

480 Athens taken by Xerxes. Battle of Salamis. Sophocles leads the chorus of victory.
Birth of Euripides.

479 Athens taken by Mardonios.

477 Commencement of Athenian Supremacy.

476 Bones of Theseus discovered in Skyros.

472 The *Persæ* of Æschylos.

CHRONOLOGICAL OUTLINE

B.C.

- 471 Birth of Thucydides.
- 468 Sophocles gains his first victory in tragedy. The *Triptolemos*.
Birth of Socrates.
- 467 Death of Simonides.
- 466 Battle of Eurymedon.
- 461 Ostracism of Kimon. Ascendancy of Pericles.
The *Oresteian Trilogy* of Æschylos.
- 456 Death of Æschylos. Herodotos recites his history at the Olympian Games (?)
- 455 Euripides appears as a writer of tragedies.
- 450 Anaxagoras retires from Athens after a residence of thirty years.
- 448 Sacred war between Delphians and Phocians.
- 441 Euripides gains the first prize.
- 440 Sophocles exhibits the *Antigone*, and is made one of the ten Athenian generals in the war with Samos. Meets Herodotos at Samos.
- 439 Sophocles returns to Athens.
- 432 Prosecution of Anaxagoras, Aspasia, and Pheidias.
- 431 Commencement of the Peloponnesian War.
- 430 Plague at Athens. *Ædipus the King* (?) *Ædipus at Colonos* (?)
- 429 Birth of Plato.
- 428 Death of Anaxagoras.
- 427 Ascendancy of Cleon. Aristophanes gains his first prize for comedy.

CHRONOLOGICAL OUTLINE

B.C.

- 424 The *Knights* of Aristophanes.
- 423 The *Clouds* of Aristophanes.
- 421 Peace of Nikias.
- 419 The *Peace* of Aristophanes.
- 416 Tragic prize gained by Agathon.
- 415 Tragic prize gained by Archippos. Sicilian Expedition. Mutilation of the Hermæ busts. Banishment of Alkibiades.
- 413 Destruction of Athenian army and fleet in Sicily. Sophocles appointed as member of constituent committee—(Πρόβουλοι).
- 411 Revolution at Athens. Council of the Four Hundred. Sophocles assents. Recall of Alkibiades.
- 409 The *Philoctetes* of Sophocles.
- 406 Battle of Arginusæ.
Death of Euripides.
Death of Sophocles.
- 401 The *Œdipus at Colonos* reproduced (?) by the younger Sophocles.



ŒDIPUS THE KING

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

ŒDIPUS, <i>King of Thebes.</i>	<i>Messenger from Corinth.</i>
CREON, <i>brother of JOCASTA.</i>	<i>Shepherd.</i>
TEIRESIAS, <i>a soothsayer.</i>	<i>Second Messenger.</i>
Priest of ZEUS.	JOCASTA, <i>wife of ŒDIPUS.</i>
<i>Chorus of Priests and Suppliants.</i>	

ARGUMENT.—*Laïos, King of Thebes, married Jocasta, daughter of Menækeus, and they had no child. And he, grieved thereat, sought counsel of the God at Delphi, and the God bade him cease to wish for children, for should a son be born to him, by that son he should surely die.¹ And then it came to pass that Jocasta bare him a son. And they, fearing the God's word, gave the boy to a shepherd, that he might cast it out upon the hill Kithæron; and so they were comforted, and deemed that they by this device had turned the oracle into a thing of nought. And thirty years afterwards, when Laïos was well stricken in years, he went again on a pilgrimage to Delphi; and thence he never came back again,—slain on the way, men knew not by whose hands. And at*

1 THE ORACLE TO LAIOS.

Laïos, Labdacos' son, thou askest for birth of fair offspring;
Lo! I will give thee a son, but know that Destiny orders
That thou by the boy's hand must die, for so to the curses of Pelops,
Whom of his son thou hast robbed, Zeus, son of Kronos, hath
granted,
And he, in his trouble of heart, called all this sorrow upon thee.

ŒDIPUS THE KING

that time the Sphinx made havoc of Thebes and all the coasts thereof, so that they had no heart nor power to search into the matter of the king's death, but sought only for some one to answer the monster's riddle,¹ and save the city and its people. And a stranger came to the city, Œdipus of Corinth, son, as it was said, of Polybos and Merope, and answered the riddle aright,² and slew the Sphinx. And then the people of the city in their joy chose Œdipus as their king, in the room of Laios, who had been slain; and Jocasta took him as her husband, and Creon, Jocasta's brother, was his chief friend and counsellor, and all things prospered with him, and he had two sons and two daughters. But soon the wrath of God fell upon Thebes, and the city was visited with a sore pestilence; and the people turned in their affliction to their Gods, and made their supplications.³

¹ THE RIDDLE OF THE SPHINX.

There lives upon earth a being, two-footed, yea, and with four feet,
Yea, and with three feet, too, yet his voice continues unchanging;
And, lo! of all things that move in earth, in heaven, or in ocean,
He only changes his nature, and yet when on most feet he walketh,
Then is the speed of his limbs most weak and utterly powerless.

² ANSWER OF ŒDIPUS.

Hear thou against thy will, thou dark-winged Muse of the
slaughtered,

Hear from my lips the end, bringing a close to thy crime:

Man is it thou hast described, who, when on earth he appeareth,

First as a babe from the womb, four-footed creeps on his way,
Then when old age cometh on, and the burden of years weighs full
heavy,

Bending his shoulders and neck, as a third foot useth his staff.

³ The starting-point of the cycle of Œdipus' legends is found in the *Odyssey*, xi. 271, where Odysseus describes the spectres that he saw in Hades:—

“ And there I looked on Epicasta's form,
Mother of Œdipus, who, knowing not,
Wrought greatest guilt, her own son marrying:
And he his father slew, and married her.
But soon the Gods disclosed it all to men,
And he, with many woes, in Thebes beloved,

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Through fateful counsels of the Gods, ruled long
O'er the Cadmeians. She, with woe outworn,
To Hades went, strong warder of the dead,
A long noose letting down from lofty roof.
And many a woe she left behind to him,
Which the Erinnyes of his mother work."

With this it will be interesting to compare Pindar, Olymp., ii.
35-42 :—

" So Destiny, who keeps of olden time
The goodly fortune of an honoured race,
With prosperous years from God,
Leads it another while
Backward to bale and woe ;
E'en when the fateful son of Laios killed
The father whom he met,
And so fulfilled
The Oracle in Pytho given of old,
And seeing it, she slew,
Erinnyes, clear of sight,
The warrior race, with fratricidal hand."

Æschylos (B.C. 471) had made it the subject of a Trilogy, tracing the working of the curse in *Laios*, *Œdipus*, *the Seven against Thebes*, of which only the last is extant.

The date of composition is uncertain. Hypotheses, which connect the description of the plague at Thebes with that at Athens in B.C. 429, or the protests against impiety with the mutilation of the Hermæ in B.C. 415, are at best uncertain.

ŒDIPUS THE KING

SCENE.—THEBES. *In the background, the palace of ŒDIPUS ; in front, the altar of ZEUS, Priests and Boys round it in the attitude of suppliants, with olive and laurel branches in their hands, entwined with woollen threads.*

Enter ŒDIPUS.

Œdip. Why sit ye here, my children, youngest brood
Of Cadmos famed of old, in solemn state,
Your hands thus wreathed with the suppliants' boughs ?
And all the city reeks with incense smoke,
And all re-echoes with your hymns and groans ;
And I, my children, counting it unmeet
To hear report from others, I have come
Myself, whom all name Œdipus the Great.—
Do thou, then, agèd Sire, since thine the right
To speak for these, tell clearly how ye stand,
In terror or submission ; speak to me 10 *
As willing helper. Heartless should I be
To see you prostrate thus, and feel no ruth.

Priest. Yea, Œdipus, thou ruler of my land,
Thou seest our age, who sit as suppliants, bowed
Around thine altars ; some as yet too weak
For distant flight, and some weighed down with age,
Priest, I, of Zeus, and these the chosen youth :
And in the market-places of the town
The people sit and wail, with wreath in hand,
By the two shrines of Pallas,¹ or the grave, 20

* These numerals refer to the Greek text, not to the translation.

¹ Probably, as at Athens Athena had two temples as Polias and

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Where still the seer Ismenos prophesies,
For this our city, as thine eyes may see,
Is sorely tempest-tossed, nor lifts its head
From out the surging sea of blood-flecked waves,
All smitten in the ripening blooms of earth,
All smitten in the herds that graze the fields,
Yea, and in timeless births of woman's fruit ;
And still the God, fire-darting Pestilence,
As deadliest foe, upon our city swoops,
And desolates the home where Cadmos dwelt,
And Hades dark grows rich in sighs and groans. 30
It is not that we deem of thee as one
Equalled with Gods in power, that we sit here,
These little ones and I, as suppliants prone ;
But, judging thee, in all life's shifting scenes,
Chiefest of men, yea, and of chiefest skill
In communings with Heaven. For thou did'st come
And freed'st this city, named of Cadmos old,
From the sad tribute which of yore we paid
To that stern songstress,¹ all untaught of us,
And all unprompted ; but by gift of God,
Men think and say, thou did'st our life upraise.
And now, dear Œdipus, most honoured lord, 40
We pray thee, we thy suppliants, find for us
Some succour, whether voice of any God,
Or any man brings knowledge to thy soul ;
For still I see, with those whom life has trained
To long-tried skill, the issues of their thoughts
Live and are mighty. Come then, noblest one,
Raise up our city ; come, take heed to it ;
As yet this land, for all thy former zeal,
Calls thee its saviour : do not give us cause

Parthenos, so also at Thebes there were two shrines dedicated to her under different names, as Onkæa and Ismenia.

¹ The tribute of human victims paid to the Sphinx, the " Muse of the slaughtered," till her riddle was solved by Œdipus.

ŒDIPUS THE KING

So to remember this thy reign, as men
Who having risen, then fall low again ; 60
But raise our state to safety. Omens good
Were then with thee ; thou did'st thy work, and now
Be equal to thyself ! If thou wilt rule,
As thou dost sway, this land wherein we dwell,
'Twere better far to rule o'er living men
Than o'er a realm dispeopled. Nought avails,
Or tower or ship, when men are not within.

Œdip. O children, wailing loud, ye come with wish
Well-known, not unknown ; well I know that ye
Are smitten, one and all, with taint of plague,
And yet though smitten, none that taint of plague 60
Feels, as I feel it. Each his burden bears,
His own and not another's ; but my heart
Mourns for the state, for you, and for myself ;
And, lo, ye wake me not as plunged in sleep,
But find me weeping, weeping many tears,
And treading many paths in wandering thought ;
And that one way of health I, seeking, found,
This have I acted on. Menœkeus' son,
Creon, my kinsman, have I sent to seek 70
The Pythian home of Phœbos, there to learn
The words or deeds wherewith to save the state ;
And even now I measure o'er the time,
And ask, "How fares he ?" grieving, for he stays,
Most strangely, far beyond the appointed day ;
But when he comes, I should be base indeed,
Failing to do whate'er the God declares.

Priest. Well hast thou spoken ! And these bring me
word,
That Creon comes advancing on his way.

Œdip. O king Apollo, may he come with chance 80
That brings deliverance, as his looks are bright.

Priest. If one may guess, he's glad. He had not
come

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Act I

Crowned with rich wreaths¹ of fruitful laurel else.

Œdip. Soon we shall know. Our voice can reach him
now.

Say, prince, our well-beloved, Menœkeus' son,
What sacred answer bring'st thou from the God?

Enter CREON.

Creon. A right good answer! E'en our evil plight,
If all goes well, may end in highest good.

Œdip. What were the words? Nor full of eager
hope,
Nor trembling panic, list I to thy speech. 90

Creon. I, if thou wish, am ready, these being by,
To tell thee all, or go within the gates.

Œdip. Speak out to all. I sorrow more for them
Than for the woe which touches me alone.

Creon. I then will speak what from the God I heard:
King Phœbos bids us chase the plague away
(The words were plain) now cleaving to our land,
Nor cherish guilt which still remains unhealed.

Œdip. But with what rites? And what the deed itself?

Creon. Or drive far off, or blood for blood repay; 100
That guilt of blood is blasting all the state.

Œdip. But whose fate is it that He pointeth to?

Creon. Once, O my king, ere thou did'st guide our state,
Our sovereign Laios ruled o'er all the land.

Œdip. So have I heard, for him I never saw.

Creon. Now the God clearly bids us, he being dead,
To take revenge on those who shed his blood.

Œdip. Yes; but where are they? How to track the
course
Of guilt all shrouded in the doubtful past?

Creon. In this our land, so said He; those who seek 110
Shall find; unsought, we lose it utterly.

¹ Creon, coming from Delphi, wears a wreath of the Parnassian laurel, its red berries mingling with the dark, glossy leaves.

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Œdip. Was it at home, or in the field, or else
In some strange land that Laios met his doom?

Creon. He went, so spake he, pilgrim-wise afar,
And never more came back as forth he went.

Œdip. Was there no courier, none who shared his road,
Who knew what, learning, one might turn to good?

Creon. Dead were they all, save one who fled for fear,
And he knew nought to tell but one small fact.

Œdip. [*Interrupting.*] And what was that? One fact
might teach us much, 120

Had we but one small starting-point of hope.

Creon. He used to tell that robbers fell on him,
Not man for man, but with outnumbering force.

Œdip. How could the robber e'er have dared this deed,
Unless some bribe from hence had tempted him?

Creon. So men might think; but Laios having died,
There was no helper for us in our ills.

Œdip. What ill then hindered, when your sovereignty
Had fallen thus, from searching out the truth?

Creon. The Sphinx, with her dark riddle, bade us look
At nearer facts, and leave the dim obscure.

Œdip. Well, be it mine to track them to their source. 130
Right well hath Phœbos, and right well hast thou,
Shown for the dead your care, and ye shall find,
As is most meet, in me a helper true,
Aiding at once my country and the God.

It is not for the sake of friends remote,
But for mine own, that I dispel this pest;
For he that slew him, whosoe'er he be,
Will wish, perchance, with such a blow to smite 140
Me also. Helping him, I help myself.

And now, my children, rise with utmost speed
From off these steps, and raise your suppliant boughs;
And let another call my people here,
The race of Cadmos, and make known that I
Will do my taskwork to the uttermost:

ŒDIPUS THE KING

So, as God wills, we prosper, or we fail.

Priest. Rise then, my children, 'twas for this we came,
For these good tidings which those lips have brought,
And Phœbos, who hath sent these oracles,
Pray that He come to save, and heal our plague. 150

[Exeunt CREON, Priest, and Suppliants, the latter taking their boughs from the altar and bearing them as they march in procession.]

Enter Chorus of Theban Citizens.

STROPHE I

Chor. O word of Zeus,¹ glad-voiced, with what intent
From Pytho, bright with gold,
Cam'st thou to Thebes, our city of high fame?
For lo! I faint for fear,
Through all my soul I quiver in suspense,
(Hear, Io Pæan! God of Delos,² hear!)
In brooding dread, what doom, of present growth,
Or as the months roll on, thy hand will work;
Tell me, O deathless Voice, thou child of golden hope!

ANTISTROPHE I

Thee first, Zeus-born Athena, thee I call,
Divine and deathless One,
And next thy sister, Goddess of our land, 160
Our Artemis, who sits,
Queen of our market, on encircled throne;
And Phœbos, the far-darter! O ye Three,³
Shine on us, and deliver us from ill!
If e'er before, when storms of woe oppressed,

¹ The oracle, though given by Apollo, is yet the voice of Zeus, of whom Apollo is but the prophet, spokesman.

² Apollo, born in Delos, passed through Attica to Pytho, his shrine at Delphi.

³ The Three named—Athena, Artemis, Phœbos—were the guardian deities of Thebes; but the tendency to bring three names together in one group in oaths and invocations runs through Greek worship generally.

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Ye stayed the fiery tide, O come and help us now !

STROPHE II

Ah me, ah me, for sorrows numberless
Press on my soul ;
And all the host is smitten, and our thoughts
Lack weapons to resist.
For increase fails of fruits of goodly earth,
And women sink in childbirth's wailing pangs,
And one by one, as flit
The swift-winged birds through air,
So, flitting to the shore of Him who dwells
Down in the darkling West,¹
Fleeter than mightiest fire,
Thou see'st them passing on.

170

ANTISTROPHE II

Yea, numberless are they who perish thus ;
And on the earth,
Still breeding plague, unpitied infants lie,
Cast out all ruthlessly ;
And wives and mothers, grey with hoary age,
Some here, some there, by every altar mourn,
With woe and sorrow crushed,
And chant their wailing plaint.
Clear thrills the sense their solemn Pæan cry,
And the sad anthem song ;
Hear, golden child of Zeus,
And send us bright-eyed help.

180

STROPHE III

And Ares the destroyer drive away !²

¹ Pluto, dwelling where the sun sinks into darkness. The symbolism of the West as the region of dead and evil, of the East as that of light and truth, belongs to the earliest parables of nature.

² The Pestilence, previously (v. 27) personified, is now identified with Ares, the God of slaughter, and, as such, the foe of the more benign deities.

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Who now, though hushed the din
Of brazen shield and spear,
With fiercest battle-cry
Wars on me mightily.
Bid him go back in flight,
Retreat from this our land,
Or to the ocean bed,
Where Amphitrite sleeps,
Or to that haven of the homeless sea
Which sweeps the Thracian shore.¹
*If waning night spares aught,
That doth the day assail :
Do thou, then, Sire almighty,
Wielding the lightning's strength,
Blast him with thy dread fiery thunderbolts.

195

200

ANTISTROPHE III

And thou, Lykeian king, the wolf's dread foe,
Fain would I see thy darts
From out thy golden bow
Go forth invincible,
Helping and bringing aid ;
And with them, winged with fire,
The rays of Artemis,
With which on Lykian hills,
She moveth on her course.
And last, O golden-crowned, I call on thee,
Named after this our land,²
Bacchos, all flushed with wine,
With clamour loud and long,
Wandering with Mænads wild,

210

¹ The Chorus prays that the pestilence may be driven either to the far western ocean, beyond the pillars of Heracles, the couch of Amphitrite, the bride of Neptune, or to the northern coasts of the Euxine, where Ares was worshipped as the special God of the Thracians.

² Bacchos, as born in Thebes, was known as the Cadmeian king, the Bœotian God, while Thebes took from him the epithet Bacchia.

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Flashing with blazing torch,
Draw near against the God whom all the Gods disown.¹
Œdip. Thou prayest, and for thy prayers, if thou wilt
hear

My words, and treat the dire disease with skill,
Thou shalt find help and respite from thy pain,—
My words, which I, a stranger to report,
A stranger to the deed, will now declare :
For I myself should fail to track it far, 220
Finding no trace to guide my steps aright.
But now, as I have joined you since the deed,
A citizen with citizens, I speak
To all the sons of Cadmos. Lives there one
Who knows of Laios, son of Labdacos,
The hand that slew him ; him I bid to tell
His tale to me ; and should it chance he shrinks
From raking up the charge against himself,
Still let him speak ; no heavier doom is his
Than to depart uninjured from the land ;
Or, if there be that knows an alien arm 230
As guilty, let him hold his peace no more ;
I will secure his gain and thanks beside.
But if ye hold your peace, if one through fear,
Or for himself, or friend, shall hide this thing,
What then I purpose let him hear from me
That man I banish, whosoe'er he be,
From out this land whose power and throne are mine ;
And none may give him shelter, none speak to him,
Nor join with him in prayers and sacrifice,
Nor give him share in holy lustral stream ; 240
But all shall thrust him from their homes, declared
Our curse and our pollution, as but now
The Pythian God's prophetic word has shown :
With acts like this, I stand before you here,

¹ So, in the *Iliad*, Ares is, of all the Gods of Olympus, most hateful to Zeus (v. 890), as the cause of all strife and slaughter.

ŒDIPUS THE KING

A helper to the God and to the dead.
All this I charge you do, for mine own sake,¹
And for the God's, and for this land that pines,
Barren and god-deserted. Wrong 'twould be
E'en if no voice from heaven had urged us on,
That ye should leave the stain of guilt uncleansed, 250
Your noblest chief, your king himself, being slain.
Yea, rather, seek and find. And since I reign,
Wielding the might his hand did wield before,
Filling his couch, and calling his wife mine,
Yea, and our offspring too, but for the fate
That fell on his, had grown in brotherhood ;
But now an evil chance on his head swooped ;
And therefore will I strive my best for him,
As for my father, and will go all lengths 260
To seek and find the murderer, him who slew
The son of Labdacos, and Polydore,
And earlier Cadmos, and Agenor old ;²
And for all those who hearken not, I pray
The Gods to give them neither fruit of earth,
Nor seed of woman,³ but consume their lives
With this dire plague, or evil worse than this.
And for the man who did the guilty deed,
Whether alone he lurks, or leagued with more,
I pray that he may waste his life away,
For vile deeds, vilely dying ; and for me,
If in my house, I knowing it, he dwells, 270
May every curse I spake on my head fall.
And you, the rest, the men from Cadmos sprung,
To whom these words approve themselves as good,
May Righteousness befriend you, and the Gods,

¹ I follow Schneidewin's arrangement of this portion of the speech.

² Œdipus, as if identifying himself already with the kingly house, goes through the whole genealogy up to the remote ancestor.

³ The imprecation agrees almost verbally with the curse of the Amphictyonic councils against sacrilege.

ŒDIPUS THE KING

In full accord, dwell with you evermore.

Chor. Since thou hast bound me by a curse, O king,
I will speak thus. I neither slew the man,
Nor know who slew. To say who did the deed
Is quest for Him who sent us on the search.

Œdip. Right well thou speak'st, but man's best
strength must fail 280
To force the Gods to do the things they will not.

Chor. Fain would I speak the thoughts that second
stand.

Œdip. Though there be third, shrink not from speak-
ing out.

Chor. One man I know, a prince, whose insight deep
Sees clear as princely Phœbos, and from him,
Teiresias, one might learn, O king, the truth.

Œdip. That too is done. No loiterer I in this,
For I, on Creon's hint, two couriers sent
To summon him, and wonder that he comes not.

Chor. Old rumours are there also, dark and dumb. 290

Œdip. And what are they? I weigh the slightest word.

Chor. 'Twas said he died by some chance traveller's
hand.

Œdip. I, too, heard that. But none the eye-witness sees.

Chor. If yet his soul be capable of awe,
Hearing thy curses, he will shrink from them.

Œdip. Words fright not him, who doing, knows no fear.

Chor. Well, here is one who'll put him to the proof.
For lo! they bring the seer inspired of God,
With whom alone of all men, truth abides.

Enter TEIRESIAS, blind and guided by a boy.

Œdip. Teiresias! thou whose mind embraceth all, 300
Told or untold, of heaven or paths of earth;
Thou knowest, although thou see'st not, what a pest
Dwells on us, and we find in thee, O prince,
Our one deliverer, yea, our only help.

ŒDIPUS THE KING

For Phœbos (if the couriers told thee not)
Sent back this word to us, who sent to ask,
That this one way was open to escape
From this fell plague,—if those who Laios slew,
We in our turn discovering should slay,
Or drive them forth as exiles from the land.
Thou, therefore, grudge not either sign from birds, 316
Or any other path of prophecy ;
But save the city, save thyself, save me ;
Save from the curse the dead has left behind ;
On thee we hang. To use our means, our power,
In doing good, is noblest service owned.

Teir. Ah me ! ah me ! how dread is wisdom's gift,
When no good issue waiteth on the wise !
I knew it all too well, and then forgot,
Or else I had not on this journey come.

Œdip. What means this ? How despondingly thou
com'st !

Teir. Let me go home ! for thus thy lot shalt thou,
And I mine own, bear easiest, if thou yield.

Œdip. No loyal words thou speak'st, nor true to Thebes
Who reared thee, holding back this oracle. [320

Teir. I see thy lips speak words that profit not :
And lest I too a like fault should commit . . .

Œdip. Now, by the Gods, unless thy reason fails,
Refuse us not, who all implore thy help.

Teir. Ah ! Reason fails you all, but ne'er will I
*Say what thou bidd'st, lest I thy troubles show.

Œdip. What mean'st thou, then ? Thou know'st and
wilt not tell, 330

But wilt betray us, and the state destroy ?

Teir. I will not pain myself nor thee. Why, then,
All vainly question ? Thou shalt never know.

Œdip. Oh, basest of the base ! (for thou would'st stir
A heart of stone ;) and wilt thou never tell,
But still abide relentless and unmoved ?

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Teir. My mood thou blamest, but thou dost not know
What dwelleth with thee while thou chidest me.

Œdip. And who would not feel anger, hearing words
Like those with which thou dost the state insult? 340

Teir. Well! come they will, though I should hold my
peace.

Œdip. If come they must, thy duty is to speak.

Teir. I speak no more. So, if thou wilt, rage on,
With every mood of wrath most desperate.

Œdip. Yes; I will not refrain, so fierce my wrath,
From speaking all my thought. I think that thou
Did'st plot the deed, and do it, though the blow
Thy hands, it may be, dealt not. Had'st thou seen,
I would have said it was thy deed alone.

Teir. And has it come to this? I charge thee, hold 350
To thy late edict, and from this day forth
Speak not to me, nor yet to these, for thou,
Thou art the accursèd plague-spot of the land.

Œdip. Art thou so shameless as to vent such words,
And dost thou think to 'scape scot-free for this?

Teir. I have escaped. The strength of truth is mine.

Œdip. Who prompted thee? This comes not from
thine art.

Teir. 'Twas thou. Thou mad'st me speak against my
will.

Œdip. What say'st thou? Speak again, that I may know.

Teir. Did'st thou not know before? Or dost thou try
me? 360

Œdip. I could not say I knew it. Speak again.

Teir. I say thou art the murderer whom thou seek'st.

Œdip. Thou shalt not twice revile, and go unharmed.

Teir. And shall I tell thee more to stir thy rage?

Œdip. Say what thou pleasest. 'Twill be said in vain.

Teir. I say that thou, in vilest intercourse
With those that dearest are, dost blindly live,
Nor see'st the depth of evil thou hast reached.

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Œdip. And dost thou think to say these things unscathed ?

Teir. I doubt it not, if truth retain her might.

Œdip. That might is not for thee ; thou can'st not claim it, 370

Blind in thine ears, thy reason, and thine eyes.

Teir. How wretched thou, thus hurling this reproach !
Such, all too soon, will all men hurl at thee.

Œdip. In one long night thou liv'st, and can'st not hurt,
Or me, or any man who sees the light.

Teir. 'Tis not thy doom to owe thy fall to me ;
Apollo is enough, be His the task.

Œdip. Are these devices Creon's, or thine own ?

Teir. It is not Creon harms thee, but thyself.

Œdip. O wealth, and sovereignty, and noblest skill 386
Surpassing skill in life so envy-fraught,

How great the ill-will dogging all your steps !

If for the sake of kingship, which the state

Hath given, unasked for, freely in mine hands,

Creon the faithful, found my friend throughout,

Now seeks with masked attack to drive me forth,

And hires this wizard, plotter of foul schemes,

A vagrant mountebank, whose sight is clear

For pay alone, but in his art stone-blind.

Is it not so ? When wast thou true seer found ? 390

Why, when the monster with her song was here,

Spak'st thou no word our countrymen to help ?

And yet the riddle lay above the ken

Of common men, and called for prophet's skill.

And this thou show'dst thou had'st not, nor by bird,

Nor any God made known ; but then I came,

I, Œdipus, who nothing know, and slew her,

With mine own counsel winning, all untaught

By flight of birds. And now thou would'st expel me, 400

And think'st to take thy stand by Creon's throne.

But, as I think, both thou and he that plans

ŒDIPUS THE KING

With thee, will hunt this mischief to your cost ;
And but that I must think of thee as old,
Thou had'st learnt wisdom, suffering what thou plann'st.

Chor. Far as we dare to guess, we think his words,
And thine, O Œdipus, in wrath are said.
Not such as these we need, but this to see,
How best to solve the God's great oracles.

Teir. King though thou be, I claim an equal right
To make reply. That power, at least, is mine :
For I am not thy slave, but Loxias' ;¹
Nor shall I stand on Creon's patronage :
And this I say, since thou my blindness mock'st,
That thou, though seeing, failest to perceive
Thy evil plight, nor where thou liv'st, nor yet
With whom thou dwellest. Know'st thou even this,
Whence thou art sprung ? All ignorant thou sinn'st
Against thine own, beneath, and on the earth :
And soon a two-edged Curse from sire and mother,
With foot of fear, shall chase thee forth from us,
Now seeing all things clear, then all things dark.
And will not then each creek repeat thy wail,
Each valley of Kithæron echoing ring,
When thou discern'st the marriage, fatal port,
To which thy prosp'rous voyage brought thy bark ?
And other ills, in countless multitude,
*Thou see'st not yet, shall make thy lot as one
*With sire's and child's. Vent forth thy wrath then loud,
On Creon, and my speech. There lives not man
Whose life shall waste more wretchedly than thine.

Œdip. Can this be longer borne ! Away with thee !
A curse light on thee ! Wilt thou not depart ?
Wilt thou not turn and from this house go back ?

Teir. I had not come, had'st thou not called me
here.

¹ The special name of Apollo as the *prophetes* of Zeus, and therefore the guardian of all seers and prophets.

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Œdip. I knew not thou would'st speak so foolishly ;
Else I had hardly fetched thee to my house.

Teir. We then, so seems it thee, are fools from birth,
But, unto those who gave thee birth, seem wise.

[*Turns to go.*]

Œdip. [*Starting forward.*] What ? Stay thy foot.
What mortal gave me birth ?

Teir. This day shall give thy birth, and work thy doom.

Œdip. What riddles dark and dim thou lov'st to speak.

Teir. Yes. But thy skill excels in solving such. 440

Œdip. Scoff thou at that in which thou'lt find me strong.

Teir. And yet this same success has worked thy fall!

Œdip. I little care, if I have saved the state.

Teir. Well, then, I go. Do thou, boy, lead me on !

Œdip. Let him lead on. Most hateful art thou near ;
Thou can'st not pain me more when thou art gone.

Teir. I go then, having said the things I came
To say. No fear of thee compels me. Thine
Is not the power to hurt me. And I say,
This man whom thou dost seek with hue-and-cry, 450
As murderer of Laios, he is here,

In show an alien sojourner, but in truth
A homeborn Theban. No delight to him
Will that discovery bring. Blind, having seen,
Poor, having rolled in wealth,—he, with a staff
Feeling his way, to a strange land shall go !

And to his sons shall he be seen at once
Father and brother, and of her who bore him
Husband and son, sharing his father's bed,
His father's murd'rer. Go thou then within, 460
And brood o'er this, and, if thou find'st me fail,
Say that my skill in prophecy is gone.

[*Exeunt ŒDIPUS and TEIRESIAS.*]

STROPHE I

Chor. Who was it that the rock oracular

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Of Delphi spake of, working
With bloody hands of all dread deeds most dread ?
Time is it now for him,
Swifter than fastest steed to bend his flight ;
For, in full armour clad,
Upon him darts, with fire
And lightning flash, the radiant Son of Zeus,
And with Him come in train
The dread and awful Powers,
The Destinies that fail not of their aim.

470

ANTISTROPHE I

For from Parnassos' heights, enwreathed with snow,
Gleaming, but now there shone
The oracle that bade us, one and all,
Track the unnamed, unknown ;
For, lo ! he wanders through the forest wild,
In caves and over rocks,
As strays the mountain bull,
In dreary loneliness with dreary tread,
Seeking in vain to shun
Dread words from central shrine ;¹
Yet they around him hover, full of life.

480

STROPHE II

Fearfully, fearfully the augur moves me.
Nor answering, aye nor no !
And what to say I know not, but float on,
And hover still in hopes,
And fail to scan things present or to come.
For not of old, nor now,
Learnt I what cause of strife at variance set
The old Labdakid race
With him, the child and heir of Polybos,
Nor can I test the tale,

490

¹ Delphi, thought of by the Greeks, as Jerusalem was in the middle ages, as the centre of the whole earth.

ŒDIPUS THE KING

And take my stand against the well-earned fame,
Of Œdipus, my lord,
As champion of the old Labdakid race,
For deaths obscure and dark !

ANTISTROPHE II

For Zeus and King Apollo, they are wise,
And know the hearts of men :
But that a seer excelleth me in skill,
This is no judgment true ;
And one man may another's wisdom pass,
By wisdom higher still.

I, for my part, before the word is plain,
Will ne'er assent in blame.

Full clear, the wingèd Maiden-monster came
Against him, and he proved,

By sharpest test, that he was wise indeed,
By all the land beloved,

And never, from my heart at least, shall come
Words that accuse of guilt.

Enter CREON.

Creon. I come, ye citizens, as having learnt
Our sovereign, Œdipus, accuses me
Of dreadful things I cannot bear to hear.
For if, in these calamities of ours,
He thinks he suffers wrongly at my hands,
In word or deed, aught tending to his hurt,
I set no value on a life prolonged,
While this reproach hangs on me ; for its harm
Affects not slightly, but is direst shame,
If through the town my name as villain rings,
By thee and by my friends a villain called.

Chor. But this reproach, it may be, came from wrath
All hasty, rather than from calm, clear mind.

Creon. And who informed him that the seer, seduced

ŒDIPUS THE KING

By my devices, spoke his lying words ?

Chor. The words were said, but with what mind I know not.

Creon. And was it with calm eyes and judgment calm, This charge was brought against my name and fame ?

Chor. I cannot say. To what our rulers do 530
I close my eyes. But here he comes himself.

Enter ŒDIPUS.

Œdip. Ho, there ! is't thou ? And does thy boldness
soar

So shameless as to come beneath my roof,
When thou, 'tis clear, dost plot against my life,
And seek'st to rob me of my sovereignty ?
Is it, by all the Gods, that thou hast seen
Or cowardice or folly in my soul,
That thou hast laid thy plans ? Or thoughtest thou
That I should neither see thy sinuous wiles,
Nor, knowing, ward them off ? This scheme of thine,
Is it not wild, backed nor by force nor friends, 540
To seek the power which force and wealth must grasp ?

Creon. Dost know what thou wilt do ? For words of thine
Hear like words back, and as thou hearest, judge.

Œdip. Cunning of speech art thou. But I am slow
Of thee to learn, whom I have found my foe.

Creon. Of this, then, first, hear what I have to
speak. . . .

Œdip. But this, then, say not, that thou art not vile.

Creon. If that thou thinkest self-willed pride avails,
Apart from judgment, know thou art not wise. 550

Œdip. If that thou think'st, thy kinsman injuring,
To do it unchastised, thou art not wise.

Creon. In this, I grant, thou speakest right ; but tell,
What form of injury hast thou to endure ?

Œdip. Did'st thou, or did'st thou not, thy counsel give,
Some one to send to fetch this reverend seer ?

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Creon. And even now by that advice I hold !

Œdip. How long a time has passed since Laios
chanced . . . [*Pauses.*]

Creon. Chanced to do what ? I understand not yet.

Œdip. Since he was smitten with the deadly blow ? ⁵⁸⁰

Creon. The years would measure out a long, long tale.

Œdip. And was this seer then practising his art ?

Creon. Full wise as now, and equal in repute.

Œdip. Did he at that time say a word of me ?

Creon. Not one, while I, at any rate, was by.

Œdip. What ? Held ye not your quest upon the dead ?

Creon. Of course we held it, but we nothing heard.

Œdip. How was it he, this wise one, spoke not then ?

Creon. I know not, and, not knowing, hold my peace.

Œdip. Thy deed thou know'st, and with clear mind
could'st speak ! 570

Creon. What is't ! I'll not deny it, if I know.

Œdip. Were he not leagued with thee he ne'er had talked
Of felon deed by me on Laios done.

Creon. If he says this, thou know'st it. I of thee
Desire to learn, as thou hast learnt of me.

Œdip. Learn then ; on me no guilt of blood shall rest.

Creon. Well, then,—my sister ? dost thou own her
wife ?

Œdip. I cannot meet this question with denial.

Creon. Rul'st thou this land in equal right with her ?

Œdip. Her every wish she doth from me receive. 580

Creon. And am not I co-equal with you twain ?

Œdip. Yes ; and just here thou show'st thyself false
friend.

Creon. Not so, if thou would'st reason with thyself,
As I will reason. First reflect on this ;
Supposest thou that one would rather choose
To reign with fears than sleep untroubled sleep
His power being equal ? I, for one, prize less
The name of king than deeds of kingly power ;

ŒDIPUS THE KING

And so would all who learn in wisdom's school.
Now without fear I have what I desire, 600
At thy hand given. Did I rule, myself,
I might do much unwillingly. Why then
Should sovereignty exert a softer charm,
Than power and might unchequered by a care?
I am not yet so cheated by myself,
As to desire aught else but honest gain.
Now all men hail me, every one salutes,
Now they who seek thy favour court my smiles,
For on this hinge does all their fortune turn.
Why then should I leave this to hunt for that?
My mind, retaining reason, ne'er could act 605
The villain's part. I was not born to love
Such thoughts, nor join another in the act;
And as a proof of this, go thou thyself,
And ask at Pytho whether I brought back,
In very deed, the oracles I heard.
And if thou find me plotting with the seer,
In common concert, not by one decree,
But two, thine own and mine, put me to death.
But charge me not with crime on shadowy proof;
For neither is it just, in random thought,
The bad to count as good, nor good as bad; 610
For to thrust out a friend of noble heart,
Is like the parting with the life we love.
And this in time thou'lt know, for time alone
Makes manifest the righteous. Of the vile
Thou may'st detect the vileness in a day.

Chor. To one who fears to fall, his words seem
good;

O king, swift counsels are not always safe.

Œdip. But when a man is swift in wily schemes,
Swift must I be to baffle plot with plot;
And if I stand and wait, he wins the day, 620
And all my state to rack and ruin goes.

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Creon. What seek'st thou, then ? to drive me from the land ?

Œdip. Not so. I seek thy death, not banishment.

Creon. When thou show'st first what grudge I bear to thee.

Œdip. And say'st thou this defying, yielding not ?

Creon. I see your mind is gone.

Œdip. My right I mind.

Creon. Mine has an equal claim.

Œdip. Nay, thou art vile.

Creon. And if thy mind is darkened . . . ?

Œdip. Still obey !

Creon. Nay, not a tyrant king.

Œdip. O country mine !

Creon. That country, too, is mine, not thine alone. 630

Chor. Cease, O my princes ! In good time I see
Jocasta coming hither from the house ;
And it were well with her to hush this brawl.

Enter JOCASTA.

Joc. Why, O ye wretched ones, this strife of tongues
Raise ye in your unwisdom, nor are shamed,
Our country suffering, private griefs to stir ?
Come thou within ; and thou, O Creon, go ;
Bring not a trifling sore to mischief great !

Creon. My sister ! Œdipus thy husband claims
The right to do me one of two great wrongs, 640
To thrust me from my fatherland, or slay me.

Œdip. 'Tis even so, for I have found him, wife,
Against my life his evil wiles devising.

Creon. May I ne'er prosper, but accursèd die,
If I have done the things he says I did !

Joc. Oh, by the Gods, believe him, Œdipus !
Respect his oath, which calls the Gods to hear ;
And reverence me, and these who stand by thee.

Chor. Hearken, my king ! Be calmer, I implore !

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Œdip. What wilt thou that I yield ?

650

Chor.

Oh, have respect

To one not weak before, who now is strong
In this his oath.

Œdip. And know'st thou what thou ask'st ?

Chor. I know right well.

Œdip. Say on, then, what thou wilt.

Chor. Hurl not to shame, on grounds of mere mis-
trust,

*The friend on whom no taint of evil hangs.

Œdip. Know then that, seeking this, thou seek'st, in
truth,

To work my death, or else my banishment.

Chor. Nay, by the Sun-God, Helios, chief of Gods !¹

May I, too, die, of God and man accursed,

[660

If I wish aught like this ! But on my soul,

Our wasting land dwells heavily ; ills on ills

*Still coming, new upon the heels of old.

Œdip. Let him depart then, even though I die,

Or from my country be thrust forth in shame :

670

Thy face, not his, I view with pitying eye ;

For him, where'er he be, is nought but hate.

Creon. Thou'rt loth to yield, 'twould seem, and wilt
be vexed

When this thy wrath is over : moods like thine

Are fitly to themselves most hard to bear.

Œdip. Wilt thou not go, and leave me ?

Creon.

I will go,

By thee misjudged, but known as just by these. [*Exit.*

Chor. Why, lady, art thou slow to lead him in ?

Joc. I fain would learn how this sad chance arose. 680

Chor. Blind haste of speech there was, and wrong
will sting.

Joc. From both of them ?

¹ Helios, specially invoked as the giver of light, discerning and making manifest all hidden things.

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Chor.

Yea, both.

Joc.

And what said each?

Chor. Enough for me, enough, our land laid low,
It seems, to leave the quarrel where it stopped.

Œdip. See'st thou, thou good in counsel, what thou dost,
Slighting my cause, and toning down thy zeal?

Chor. My chief, not once alone I spoke,
Unwise, unapt for wisdom should I seem, 690
Were I to turn from thee aside,
Who, when my country rocked in storm,
Did'st right her course. Ah! if thou can'st,
Steer her well onward now.

Joc. Tell me, my king, what cause of fell debate
Has bred this discord, and provoked thy soul.

Œdip. Thee will I tell, for thee I honour more 700
Than these. 'Twas Creon and his plots against me.

Joc. Say then, if clearly thou can'st tell the strife.

Œdip. He says that I am Laios' murderer.

Joc. Of his own knowledge, or by some one taught?

Œdip. A scoundrel seer suborning. For himself,
He takes good care to free his lips from blame.

Joc. Leave now thyself, and all thy thoughts of this,
And list to me, and learn how little skill
In art prophetic mortal man may claim;
And of this truth, I'll give thee one short proof. 710
There came to Laios once an oracle,

(I say not that it came from Phœbos' self,
But from his servants,) that his fate was fixed
By his son's hand to fall—his own and mine;
And him, so rumour runs, a robber band
Of aliens slay, where meet the three great roads.
Nor did three days succeed the infant's birth,
Before, by other hands, he cast him forth,
Piercing his ankles, on a lonely hill.

Here, then, Apollo failed to make the boy 720
His father's murderer; nor by his son's hands,

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Doom that he dreaded, did our Laios die ;
Such things divining oracles proclaimed ;
Therefore regard them not. Whate'er the God
Desires to search He will himself declare.

Œdip. [*Trembling.*] Ah, as but now I heard thee speak,
my queen,

Strange whirl of soul, and rush of thoughts o'ercome me

Joc. What vexing care bespeaks this sudden change ?

Œdip. I thought I heard thee say that Laios fell,
Smitten to death where meet the three great roads. 730

Joc. So was it said, and still the rumours hold.

Œdip. Where was the spot in which this matter passed ?

Joc. They call the country Phocis, and the roads¹
From Delphi and from Daulia there converge.

Œdip. And what the interval of time since then ?

Joc. But just before thou camest to possess
And rule this land the tidings reached our city.

Œdip. Great Zeus! what fate hast thou decreed for me ?

Joc. What thought is this, my Œdipus, of thine ?

Œdip. Ask me not yet, but Laios, . . . tell of him,⁷⁴⁰
His build, his features, and his years of life.

Joc. Tall was he, and the white hairs snowed his head,
And in his form not much unlike to thee.

Œdip. Woe, woe is me ! so seems it I have plunged
All blindly into curses terrible.

Joc. What sayest thou ? I fear to look at thee.

Œdip. I tremble lest the seer has seen indeed :
But thou can'st clear it, answering yet once more.

Joc. And I too fear, yet what thou ask'st I'll tell.

Œdip. Went he in humble guise, or with a troop 750
Of spearmen, as becomes a man that rules ?

Joc. Five were they altogether, and of them

¹ The meeting place of the three roads is now the site of a decayed Turkish village, the *Stavrodrom* of Mparpanas.

In Æschylos (Fragm. 160), the scene of the murder was laid at Potniæ, on the road between Thebes and Plataea. As the name indicates, the Erinnyes were worshipped there.

ŒDIPUS THE KING

One was a herald, and one chariot bore him.

Œdip. Woe ! woe ! 'tis all too clear. And who was he
That told these tidings to thee, O my queen ?

Joc. A servant who alone escaped with life.

Œdip. And does he chance to dwell among us now ?

Joc. Not so ; for from the time when he returned,
And found thee bearing sway, and Laios dead,
He, at my hand, a suppliant, implored 760
This boon, to send him to the distant fields
To feed his flocks, as far as possible
From this our city. And I sent him forth ;
For though a slave, he might have claimed yet more.

Œdip. Ah ! could we fetch him quickly back again !

Joc. That may well be. But why dost thou wish this ?

Œdip. I fear, O queen, that words best left unsaid
Have passed these lips, and therefore wish to see him.

Joc. Well, he shall come. But some small claim have I,
O king, to learn what touches thee with woe. 770

Œdip. Thou shalt not fail to learn it, now that I
Have gone so far in bodings. Whom should I
More than to thee tell all the passing chance ?
I had a father, Polybos of Corinth,
And Merope of Doris was my mother,
And I was held in honour by the rest
Who dwelt there, till this accident befel,
Worthy of wonder, of the heat unworthy
It roused within me. Thus it chanced : A man
At supper, in his cups, with wine o'ertaken,
Reviles me as a spurious changeling boy ; 780
And I, sore vexèd, hardly for that day
Restrained myself. And when the morrow came
I went and charged my father and my mother
With what I thus had heard. They heaped reproach
On him who stirred the matter, and I soothed
My soul with what they told me ; yet it teased,
Still vexing more and more ; and so I went,

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Unknown to them, to Pytho, and the God
Sent me forth shamed, unanswered in my quest ;
And other things He spake, dread, dire, and dark, 790
That I should join in wedlock with my mother,
Beget a brood that men should loathe to look at,
Be murderer of the father that begot me.

And, hearing this, I straight from Corinth fled,
The stars thenceforth the land-marks of my way,
And fled where never more mine eyes might see
The shame of those dire oracles fulfilled ;
And as I went I reached the spot where he,
This king, thou tell'st me, met the fatal blow.
And now, O lady, I will tell the truth. 800

Wending my steps that way where three roads meet,
There met me first a herald, and a man
Like him thou told'st of, riding on his car,
Drawn by young colts. With rough and hasty force
They drove me from the road,—the driver first,
And that old man himself ; and then in rage
I strike the driver, who had turned me back,
And when the old man sees it, watching me
As by the chariot side I passed, he struck
My forehead with a double-pointed goad.
But we were more than quits, for in a trice
With this right hand I struck him with my staff, 810
And he rolls backward from his chariot's seat.

And then I slay them all. And if it chance
That Laios and this stranger are akin,
What man more wretched than this man who speaks ?
What man more harassed by the vexing Gods ?
He whom none now, or alien, or of Thebes,
May welcome to their house, or speak to him,
But thrust him forth an exile. And 'twas I,
None other, who against myself proclaimed 820
These curses. And the bed of him that died
I with my hands, by which he fell, defile.

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Am I not born to evil, all unclean ?
If I must flee, yet still in flight my doom
Is never more to see the friends I love,
Nor tread my country's soil ; or else to bear
The guilt of incest, and my father slay,
Yea, Polybos, who begat and brought me up.
Would not a man say right who said that here
Some cruel God was pressing hard on me ?
Not that, not that, at least, thou Presence, pure
And awful, of the Gods ; may I ne'er look
On such a day as that, but far away
Depart unseen from all the haunts of men,
Before such great pollution comes on me.

830

Chor. We, too, O king, are grieved, yet hope thou on,
Till thou hast asked the man who then was by.

82
Œdip. And this indeed is all the hope I have,
Waiting until that shepherd-slave appear.

Joc. And when he comes, what ground for hope is there ?

Œdip. I'll tell thee. Should he now repeat the tale
Thou told'st me, I, at least, stand free from guilt. 840

Joc. What special word was that thou heard'st from
me ?

Œdip. Thou said'st he told that robbers slew his lord,
And should he give their number as the same
Now as before, it was not I who slew him,
For one man could not be the same as many,
But if he speak of one man, all alone,
Then, all too plain, the deed cleaves fast to me.

Joc. But know, the thing was said, and clearly said,
And now he cannot from his word draw back.
Not I alone, but the whole city, heard it ;
And should he now retract his former tale,
Not then, my husband, will he rightly show
The death of Laios, who, as Loxias told,
By my son's hands should die ; and yet, poor boy,
He killed him not, but perished long ago,

850

ŒDIPUS THE KING

So I, at least, for all their oracles,
Will never more cast glance or here, or there.

Œdip. Thou reasonest well. Yet send a messenger
To fetch that peasant. Be not slack in this. 860

Joc. I will make haste. But let us now go in ;
I would do nothing that displeaseth thee. [*Exeunt*

STROPHE I

Chor. O that 'twere mine to keep
An awful purity,
In words and deeds whose laws on high are set
Through heaven's clear æther spread,
Whose birth Olympus boasts,
Their one, their only sire,
Wnom man's frail flesh begat not,
Nor in forgetfulness 870
Shall lull to sleep of death ;
In them our God is great,
In them He grows not old for evermore.

ANTISTROPHE I

But pride begets the mood
Of wanton, tyrant power ;
Pride filled with many thoughts, yet filled in vain,
Untimely, ill-advised,
Scaling the topmost height,
Falls to the abyss of woe,
Where step that profiteth
It seeks in vain to take.
I ask our God to stay
The labours never more
That work our country's good ; 880
I will not cease to call on God for aid.

STROPHE II

But if there be who walketh haughtily,
In action or in speech,

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Whom Righteousness herself has ceased to awe,
Who shrines of Gods reveres not,

An evil fate be his,

(Fit meed for all his evil boastfulness ;)

Unless he gain his gains more righteously,

*And draweth back from deeds of sacrilege,

*Nor lays rash hand upon the holy things,

By man inviolable :

Who now, if such things be,

*Will boast that he can guard

*His soul from darts of wrath ?

If deeds like these are held in high repute,

What profit is 't for me

To raise my choral strain ?

899

ANTISTROPHE II

No longer will I go in pilgrim's guise,

To yon all holy place,

Earth's central shrine, nor Abæ's temple old,

Nor to Olympia's fane,¹

Unless these things shall stand

In sight of all men, tokens clear from God.

But, O thou sovereign Ruler ! if that name,

O Zeus, belongs to thee, who reign'st o'er all,

Let not this trespass hide itself from thee,

Or thine undying sway ;

For now they set at nought

The worn-out oracles,

That Laïos heard of old,

And king Apollo's wonted worship flags,

And all to wreck is gone

The homage due to God.

900

910

¹ The central shrine is, as in 480, Delphi, where a white oval stone was supposed to be the very centre, or *omphalos* of the earth. At Abæ, in Phocis, was an oracle of Apollo, believed to be older than that of Delphi. In Olympia, the priests of Zeus divined from the clearness or dimness of the fire upon the altar.

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Enter JOCASTA, followed by Attendants.

Joc. Princes of this our land, across my soul
There comes the thought to go from shrine to shrine
Of all the Gods, these garlands in my hand,
And waving incense ; for our Œdipus
Vexes his soul too wildly with all woes,
And speaks not as a man should speak who scans
New issues by experience of the old,
But hangs on every breath that tells of fear.
And since I find that my advice avails not,
To thee, Lykeian King, Apollo, first
I come,—for thou art nearest,—suppliant
With these devotions, trusting thou wilt work
Some way of healing for us, free from guilt ;
For now we shudder, all of us, seeing him,
The good ship's pilot, stricken down with fear.

920

Enter Messenger.

Mess. May I inquire of you, O strangers, where
To find the house of Œdipus the king,
And, above all, where he is, if ye know ?

Chor. This is the house, and he, good sir, within,
And here stands she, the mother of his children.

Mess. Good fortune be with her and all her kin,
Being, as she is, his true and honoured wife.

930

Joc. Like fortune be with thee, my friend. Thy speech,
So kind, deserves no less. But tell me why
Thou comest, what thou hast to ask or tell.

Mess. Good news to thee, and to thy husband, lady.

Joc. What is it, then ? and who has sent thee here ?

Mess. I come from Corinth, and the news I 'll tell
May give thee joy. How else ? Yet thou may'st grieve.

Joc. What is the news that has this twofold power ?

Mess. The citizens that on the Isthmus dwell
Will make him sovereign. So the rumour ran.

940

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Joc. What ! Does old Polybos hold his own no more ?

Mess. Nay, nay. Death holds him in his sepulchre.

Joc. What say'st thou ? Polybos, thy king, is dead ?

Mess. If I speak false, I bid you take my life.

Joc. Go, maiden, at thy topmost speed, and tell Thy master this. Now, oracles of Gods,
Where are ye now ? Long since my Œdipus
Fled, fearing lest his hand should slay the man ;
And now he dies by fate, and not by him.

Enter ŒDIPUS.

Œdip. Mine own Jocasta, why, O dearest one, 950
Why hast thou sent to fetch me from the house ?

Joc. List this man's tale, and, when thou hearest, see
The plight of those the God's dread oracles.

Œdip. Who then is this, and what has he to tell ?

Joc. He comes from Corinth, and he brings thee word
That Polybos thy father lives no more.

Œdip. What say'st thou, friend ? Tell me thy tale
thyself.

Mess. If I must needs report the story clear,
Know well that he has gone the way of death.

Œdip. Was it by plot, or chance of some disease ? 960

Mess. An old man's frame a little stroke lays low.

Œdip. By some disease, 'twould seem, he met his death ?

Mess. Yes, that, and partly worn by lingering age.

Œdip. Ha ! ha ! Why now, my queen, should we
regard

The Pythian hearth oracular, or birds
In mid-air crying ?¹ By their auguries,
I was to slay my father. And he dies,
And the grave hides him ; and I find myself

¹ The "Pythian hearth," with special reference to the apparent failure of the Delphic oracle ; "birds," to that of the auguries of Teiresias.

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Handling no sword ; . . . unless for love of me
He pined away, and so I caused his death. 970
So Polybos is gone, and bears with him,
In Hades 'whelmed, those worthless oracles.

Joc. Did I not tell thee this long time ago ?

Œdip. Thou did'st, but I was led away by fears.

Joc. Dismiss them, then, for ever from thy thoughts !

Œdip. And yet that "incest" ; must I not fear that ?

Joc. Why should we fear, when chance rules everything,
And foresight of the future there is none ;
'Tis best to live at random, as one can.

But thou, fear not that marriage with thy mother : 980
Many ere now have dreamt of things like this,
But who cares least about them bears life best.

Œdip. Right well thou speakest all things, save that she
Still lives that bore me, and I can but fear,
Seeing that she lives, although thou speakest well.

Joc. And yet great light comes from thy father's grave.

Œdip. Great light I own ; yet while she lives I fear.

Mess. Who is this woman about whom ye fear ?

Œdip. 'Tis Merope, old sir, who lived with Polybos.

Mess. And what leads you to think of her with fear ? 990

Œdip. A fearful oracle, my friend, from God.

Mess. Can'st tell it ? or must others ask in vain ?

Œdip. Most readily : for Loxias said of old
That I should with my mother wed, and then
With mine own hands should spill my father's blood.
And therefore Corinth long ago I left,
And journeyed far, right prosperously I own ;—
And yet 'tis sweet to see one's parents' face.

Mess. And did this fear thy steps to exile lead ? 1000

Œdip. I did not wish to take my father's life.

Mess. Why, then, O king, did I, with good-will come,
Not free thee from this fear that haunts thy soul ?

Œdip. Yes, and for this thou shalt have worthy thanks.

Mess. For this, indeed, I chiefly came to thee ;

ŒDIPUS THE KING

That I on thy return might prosper well.

Œdip. And yet I will not with a parent meet.

Mess. 'Tis clear, my son, thou know'st not what thou dost.

Œdip. What is't ? By all the Gods, old man, speak out.

Mess. If 'tis for them thou fearest to return . . . 1010

Œdip. I fear lest Phœbos prove himself too true.

Mess. Is it lest thou should'st stain thy soul through them ?

Œdip. This self-same fear, old man, for ever haunts me.

Mess. And know'st thou not there is no cause for fear ?

Œdip. Is there no cause if I was born their son ?

Mess. None is there. Polybos was nought to thee.

Œdip. What say'st thou ? Did not Polybos beget me ?

Mess. No more than he thou speak'st to ; just as much.

Œdip. How could a father's claim become as nought ?

Mess. Well, neither he begat thee nor did I. 1020

Œdip. Why then did he acknowledge me as his ?

Mess. He at my hands received thee as a gift.

Œdip. And could he love another's child so much ?

Mess. Yes ; for his former childlessness wrought on him.

Œdip. And gav'st thou me as foundling or as bought ?

Mess. I found thee in Kithæron's shrub-grown hollow.

Œdip. And for what cause did'st travel thitherwards ?

Mess. I had the charge to tend the mountain flocks.

Œdip. Wast thou a shepherd, then, and seeking hire ?

Mess. E'en so, my son, and so I saved thee then. 1030

Œdip. What evil plight then did'st thou find me in ?

Mess. The sinews of thy feet would tell that tale.

Œdip. Ah, me ! why speak'st thou of that ancient wrong ?

Mess. I freed thee when thy insteps both were pierced.

Œdip. A foul disgrace I had in swaddling-clothes.

Mess. Thus from this chance there came the name thou bearest.

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Œdip. [*Starting.*] Who gave the name, my father or my mother?

Mess. I know not. He who gave thee better knows.

Œdip. Did'st thou then take me from another's hand, Not finding me thyself?

Mess. Not I, indeed;
Another shepherd made a gift of thee. 1040

Œdip. Who was he? Know'st thou how to point him out?

Mess. They called him one of those that Laios owned.

Œdip. Mean'st thou the former sovereign of this land?

Mess. E'en so. He fed the flocks of him thou nam'st.

Œdip. And is he living still that I might see him?

Mess. You, his own countrymen, should know that best.

Œdip. Is there of you who stand and listen here
One who has known the shepherd that he tells of,
Or seeing him upon the hills or here?
If so, declare it; 'tis full time to know. 1050

Chor. I think that this is he whom from the fields
But now thou soughtest. But Jocasta here
Could tell thee this with surer word than I.

Œdip. Think'st thou, my queen, the man whom late
we sent for
Is one with him of whom this stranger speaks?
Joc. [*With forced calmness.*] Whom did he speak of?
Care not thou for it,
Nor even wish to keep his words in mind.

Œdip. I cannot fail, once getting on the scent,
To track at last the secret of my birth.

Joc. Ah, by the Gods, if that thou valuest life 1080
Inquire no more. My misery is enough.

Œdip. Take heart; though I should prove thrice base-
born slave,
Born of thrice base-born mother, thou art still
Free from all stain.

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Joc. Yet, I implore thee, pause!
Yield to my counsels, do not do this deed.

Œdip. I may not yield, nor fail to search it out.

Joc. And yet best counsels give I, for thy good.

Œdip. What thou call'st best has long been grief to me.

Joc. May'st thou ne'er know, ill-starred one, who thou art!

Œdip. Will some one bring that shepherd to me here?
Leave her to glory in her high descent. 1070

Joc. Woe! woe! ill-fated one! my last word this,
This only, and no more for evermore. [*Rushes out.*]

Chor. Why has thy queen, O Œdipus, gone forth
In her wild sorrow rushing? Much I fear
Lest from such silence evil deeds burst out.

Œdip. Burst out what will; I seek to know my birth,
Low though it be, and she perhaps is shamed
(For, like a woman, she is proud of heart)
At thoughts of my low birth; but I, who count
Myself the child of Fortune, fear no shame; 1080
My mother she, and she has prospered me.
And so the months that span my life have made me
Both low and high; but whatsoe'er I be,
Such as I am I am, and needs must on
To fathom all the secret of my birth.

STROPHE

Chor. If the seer's gift be mine,
Or skill in counsel wise,
Thou, O Kithæron, by Olympos high, 1090
When next our full moon comes,
Shalt fail not to resound
With cry that greets thee, fellow-citizen,
Mother and nurse of Œdipus;
And we will on thee weave our choral dance,
As bringing to our princes glad good news.

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Hail, hail ! O Phœbos, grant that what we do
May meet thy favouring smile.

ANTISTROPHE

Who was it bore thee, child,¹
Of Nymphs whose years are long,
Or drawing near the mighty Father, Pan, 1100
Who wanders o'er the hills,
Or Loxias' paramour,
Who loves the high lawns of the pasturing flocks ?
Or was it He who rules
Kyllene's height ; or did the Bacchic god,
Whose dwelling is upon the mountain peaks,
Receive thee, gift of Heliconian nymphs,
With whom He loves to sport ?

Œdip. If I must needs conjecture, who as yet 1110
Ne'er met the man, I think I see the shepherd,
Whom this long while we sought for. In his age
He this man matches. And I see besides,
My servants bring him. Thou perchance can'st speak
From former knowledge yet more certainly.

Chor. I know him, king, be sure ; for this man stood,
If any, known as Laios' herdsman true.

Enter Shepherd.

Œdip. Thee first I ask, Corinthian stranger, say,
Is this the man ?

Mess. The very man thou seek'st. 1120

Œdip. Ho there ! old man. Come hither, look on me,
And tell me all. Did Laios own thee once ?

Shep. His slave I was, not bought, but reared at home.

¹ The Chorus, thinking only of the wonder of Œdipus's birth, plays with the conjecture that he is the offspring of the Gods, of Pan, the God of the hills, or Apollo, the prophet God, or Hermes, worshipped on Kyllene in Arcadia ; or Bacchos, roaming on the highest peaks of Parnassos. The Heliconian nymphs are, of course, the Muses.

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Œdip. What was thy work, or what thy mode of life ?

Shep. Near all my life I followed with the flock.

Œdip. And in what regions did'st thou chiefly dwell ?

Shep. Now 'twas Kithæron, now on neighbouring fields.

Œdip. Know'st thou this man ? Did'st ever see him there ?

Shep. What did he do ? Of what man speakest thou ?

Œdip. This man now present. Did ye ever meet ? ¹¹³⁰

Shep. I cannot say off-hand from memory.

Mess. No wonder that, my lord. But I'll remind him
Right well of things forgotten. Well I know
He needs must know when on Kithæron's fields,
He with a double flock, and I with one,
I was his neighbour during three half years,
From springtide till Arcturos rose ; and I
In winter to mine own fold drove my flocks,
And he to those of Laios. [*To Shepherd.*] Answer
me, 1140

Speak I, or speak I not, the thing that was ?

Shep. Thou speak'st the truth, although long years
have passed.

Mess. Come, then, say on. Dost know thou gav'st me
once

A boy, that I might rear him as my child ?

Shep. What means this ? Wherefore askest thou of
that ?

Mess. Here stands he, fellow ! that same tiny boy.

Shep. A curse befall thee ! Wilt not hold thy tongue ?

Œdip. Rebuke him not, old man ; thy words need
more

The language of rebuker than do his.

Shep. Say, good my lord, what fault do I commit ?

Œdip. This, that thou tell'st not of the child he asks
for. 1150

Shep. Yes, for he nothing knows, and wastes his pains.

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Œdip. For favour thou speak'st not, but shalt for
pain. . . . [*Strikes him.*]

Shep. By all the Gods, hurt not an old man weak.

Œdip. Will no one bind his hands behind his back ?¹

Shep. Oh wretched me ! And what then wilt thou
learn ?

Œdip. Gav'st thou this man the boy of whom he asks ?

Shep. I gave him. Would that I that day had died.

Œdip. Soon thou wilt come to that if thou speak'st
wrong.

Shep. Nay, much more shall I perish if I speak.

Œdip. This fellow, as it seems, would tire us out. 1160

Shep. Not so. I said long since I gave it him.

Œdip. Whence came it ? Was the child thine own or
not ?

Shep. Mine own 'twas not, from some one else I had it.

Œdip. Which of our people, or from out what home ?

Shep. Oh, by the Gods, my master, ask no more !

Œdip. Thou diest if I question this again.

Shep. Some one it was of Laios' household born.

Œdip. Was it a slave, or some one kin to him ?

Shep. Ah me, I stand upon the very brink

Where most I dread to speak.

Œdip. And I to hear :

And yet I needs must hear it, come what may. 1170

Shep. The boy was said to be his son ; but she,

Thy queen within, could tell the whole truth best.

Œdip. What ! was it she who gave it ?

Shep. Yea, O king !

Œdip. And to what end ?

Shep. To make away with it.

Œdip. And dared a mother . . . ?

Shep. Auguries dark she feared.

Œdip. What were they ?

¹ Sc., Will no one scourge him at my command, and make him
confess ?

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Shep. E'en that he his sire should kill.

Œdip. Why then did'st thou to this old man resign
him?

Shep. I pitied him, O master, and I thought
That he would bear him to another land,
Whence he himself had come. But him he saved
For direst evil. For if thou be he 1180
Whom this man speaks of, thou art evil-starred.

Œdip. Woe! woe! woe! woe! all cometh clear at last.
O light, may this my last glance be on thee,
Who now am seen owing my birth to those
To whom I ought not, and with whom I ought not
In wedlock living, whom I ought not slaying. [*Exit.*]

STROPHE I

Chor. Ah, race of mortal men,
How as a thing of nought
I count ye, though ye live;
For who is there of men
That more of blessing knows, 1190
Than just a little while
To seem to prosper well,
And, having seemed, to fall?
With thee as pattern given,
Thy destiny, e'en thine,
Ill-fated Œdipus,
I count nought human blest.

ANTISTROPHE I

For he, with wondrous skill,
Taking his aim, did hit
Success, in all things blest;
And did, O Zeus! destroy
The Virgin with claws bent,
And sayings wild and dark;
And against many deaths
A tower and strong defence 1200

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Did for my country rise :
And so thou king art named,
With highest glory crowned,
Ruling in mighty Thebes.

STROPHE II

And now, who lives than thou more miserable ?
Who equals thee in wild woes manifold,
In shifting turns of life ?
Ah, noble one, our Œdipus !
For whom the same wide harbour
Sufficed for sire and son,
In marriage rites to enter :
Ah how, ah, wretched one,
How could thy father's bed
Receive thee, and so long,
Even till now, be dumb ?

1217

ANTISTROPHE III

Time, who sees all things, he hath found thee out,
Against thy will, and long ago condemned
The wedlock none may wed,
Begetter and begotten.
Ah, child of Laios ! would
I ne'er had seen thy face !
I mourn with wailing lips,
Mourn sore exceedingly.
'Tis simplest truth to say,
By thee from death I rose,
By thee in death I sleep.

1220

Enter Second Messenger.

Sec. Mess. Ye chieftains, honoured most in this our land
What deeds ye now will hear of, what will see,
How great a wailing will ye raise, if still
Ye truly love the house of Labdacos !
For sure I think that neither Istros' stream

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Nor Phasis' floods could purify this house,¹
Such horrors does it hold. But soon 'twill show
Evils self-chosen, not without free choice : 1230
These self-sought sorrows ever pain men most.

Ghor. The ills we knew before lacked nothing meet
For plaint and moaning. Now, what add'st thou more ?

Sec. Mess. Quickest for me to speak, and thee to learn ;
Our sacred queen Jocasta,—she is dead.

Ghor. Ah, crushed with many sorrows ! How and
why ?

Sec. Mess. Herself she slew. The worst of all that
passed

I must omit, for none were there to see.
Yet, far as memory suffers me to speak,
That sorrow-stricken woman's end I'll tell ; 1240
For when to passion yielding, on she passed
Within the porch, straight to the couch she rushed,
Her bridal bed, with both hands tore her hair,
And as she entered, dashing through the doors,
Calls on her Laios, dead long years ago,
Remembering that embrace of long ago,
Which brought him death, and left to her who bore,
With his own son a hateful motherhood.
And o'er her bed she wailed, where she had borne
Spouse to her spouse, and children to her child ; 1250
And how she perished after this I know not ;
For Œdipus struck in with woeful cry,
And we no longer looked upon her fate,
But gazed on him as to and fro he rushed.
For so he raves, and asks us for a sword,
Wherewith to smite the wife that wife was none,
The womb polluted with accursèd births,
Himself, his children,—so, as thus he raves,
Some spirit shows her to him, (none of us,
Who stood hard by had done so) : with a shout

¹ Istros as the great river of Europe, Phasis of Asia.

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Most terrible, as some one led him on, 1260
Through the two gates he leapt, and from the wards
He slid the hollow bolt, and rushes in ;
And there we saw his wife had hung herself,
By twisted cords suspended. When her form
He saw, poor wretch ! with one wild, fearful cry,
The twisted rope he loosens, and she fell,
Ill-starred one, on the ground. Then came a sight
Most fearful. Tearing from her robe the clasps,
All chased with gold, with which she decked herself,
He with them struck the pupils of his eyes, 1270
With words like these—"Because they had not seen
What ills he suffered and what ills he did,
They in the dark should look, in time to come,
On those whom they ought never to have seen,
Nor know the dear ones whom he fain had known."
With such like wails, not once or twice alone,
Raising his eyes, he smote them, and the balls,
All bleeding, stained his cheek, nor poured they forth
Gore drops slow trickling, but the purple shower
Fell fast and full, a pelting storm of blood.
Such were the ills that sprang from both of them,
Not on one only, wife and husband both. 1280
His ancient fortune, which he held of old,
Was truly fortune : but for this day's doom
Wailing and woe, and death and shame, all forms
That man can name of evil, none have failed.

Chor. What rest from suffering hath the poor wretch
now ?

Sec. Mess. He calls to us to ope the bolts, and show
To all in Thebes his father's murderer,
His mother's . . . Foul and fearful were the words
He spoke ; I dare not speak them. Then he said
That he would cast himself adrift, nor stay 1290
At home accursèd, as himself had cursed.
Some stay he surely needs, or guiding hand,

ŒDIPUS THE KING

For greater is the ill than he can bear,
And this he soon will show thee, for the bolts
Of the two gates are opening, and thou 'lt see
A sight to touch e'en hatred's self with pity.

*The doors of the Palace are thrown open, and ŒDIPUS is
seen within.*

Chor. Oh, fearful sight for men to look upon!
Most fearful of all woes
I hitherto have known! What madness strange
Has come on thee, thou wretched one? 1300
What Power with one fell swoop,
Ills heaping upon ill,
Than greatest greater yet,
Has marked thee for its prey?
Woe! woe! thou doomed one, wishing much to ask,
And much to learn, and much to gaze into,
I cannot look on thee,
So horrible the sight!
Œdip. Ah, woe! ah, woe! ah, woe!
Woe for my misery!
Where am I wandering in my utter woe?
Where floats my voice in air?
Dread Power, with crushing might 1310
Thou leaped'st on my head.

Chor. Yea, with dread doom nor sight nor speech
may bear.

Œdip. O cloud of darkness, causing one to shrink,
That onward sweeps with dread ineffable,
Resistless, borne along by evil blast,
Woe, woe, and woe again!
How through me darts the throb these clasps have caused,
And memory of my ill.

Chor. And who can wonder that in such dire woes
Thou mournest doubly, bearing twofold ill? 1320

Œdip. Ah, friend,

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Thou only keepest by me, faithful found,
Nor dost the blind one slight.

Woe, woe,
For thou escap'st me not ; I clearly know,
Though all is dark, at least that voice of thine.

Chor. O man of fearful deeds, how could'st thou
bear

Thine eyes to outrage ? What Power stirred thee to it ?

Œdip. Apollo, oh, my friends, the God, Apollo,
Who worketh out all these, my bitter woes : 1334
Yet no man's hand but mine has smitten them.

What need for me to see,
When nothing's left that's sweet to look upon ?

Chor. Too truly dost thou speak the thing that is.

Œdip. Yea, what remains to see,

Or what to love, or hear,

With any touch of joy ?

Lead me away, my friends, with utmost speed 1340

Lead me away, the foul polluted one,

Of all men most accursed,

Most hateful to the Gods.

Chor. Ah, wretched one, alike in soul and doom,
I fain could wish that I had never known thee.

Œdip. Ill fate be his who from the fetters freed

*The child upon the hills,

*And rescued me from death, 1350

And saved me,—thankless boon !

Ah ! had I died but then,

Nor to my friends nor me had been such woe.

Chor. I, too, could fain wish that.

Œdip. Yes ; then I had not been

My father's murderer :

Nor had men pointed to me as the man

Wedded with her who bore him.

But now all godless, born of impious stock, 1364

In incest joined with her who gave me birth ;—

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Yea, if there be an evil worse than all,
It falls on Œdipus !

Chor. I may not say that thou art well-advised,
For better wert thou dead than living blind.

Œdip. Persuade me not, nor counsel give to show
That what I did was not the best to do. 1370
I know not with what eyes, in Hades dark,
To look on mine own father or my mother,
When I against them both, alas ! have done
Deeds for which strangling were too light a doom.
My children's face, forsooth, was sweet to see,
Their birth being what it was ; nay, nay, not so
To these mine eyes, nor yet this town, nor tower,
Nor sacred shrines of Gods whence I, who stood
Most honoured one in Thebes, myself have banished, 1380
Commanding all to thrust the godless forth,
Him whom the Gods do show accursed, the stock
Of Laios old. And could I dare to look,
Such dire pollution fixing on myself,
And meet these face to face ? Not so, not so.
Yea, if I could but stop the stream of sound,
And dam mine ears against it, I would do it,
Sealing my carcase vile, that I might live
Both blind, and hearing nothing. Sweet 'twould be 1390
To keep my soul beyond the reach of ills.
Why, O Kithæron, did'st thou shelter me,
Nor kill me out of hand ? I had not shown,
In that case, all men whence I drew my birth.
O Polybos, and Corinth, and the home
Of old called mine, how strange a growth ye reared,
All fair outside, all rotten at the core ;
For vile I stand, descended from the vile.
Ye threefold roads and thickets half concealed,
The copse, the narrow pass where three ways meet,
Which at my hands did drink my father's blood,
Remember ye, what deeds I did in you,

ŒDIPUS THE KING

What, hither come, I did?—O marriage rites
That gave me birth, and, having borne me, gave
'To me in turn an offspring, and ye showed
Fathers, and sons, and brothers, all in one,
Mothers, and wives, and daughters, hateful names,
All foulest deeds that men have ever done.
But, since, where deeds are evil, speech is wrong,
With utmost speed, by all the Gods, or slay me,
Or drive me forth, or hide me in the sea, 1410
Where never more your eyes may look on me.
Come, scorn ye not to touch a wretch like me,
But hearken; fear ye not; no soul save me
Can bear the burden of my countless ills.
But ye, if ye have lost your sense of shame
For mortal men, yet reverence the light
Of him, our King, the Sun-God, source of life,
Nor sight so foul expose unveiled to view,
Which neither earth, nor shower from heaven, nor light,
Can see and welcome. But with utmost speed
Convey me in; for nearest kin alone 1420
Can meetly see and hear their kindred's ills.¹

Chor. The man for what thou need'st is come in time,
Creon, to counsel, and to act, for now
He in thy stead is left our state's one guide.²

Œdip. Ah, me! what language shall I hold to him,
What trust at his hands claim? In all the past
I showed myself to him most vile and base.

Enter CREON.

Creon. I have not come, O Œdipus, to scorn,
Nor to reproach thee for thy former crimes.

Œdip. Oh, by the Gods! since thou, beyond my hopes, ¹⁴³⁰

¹ I follow Schneidewin in transferring the last lines from Creon (after 1430) to Œdipus.

² The two sons of Œdipus, Polyneikes and Eteocles, the Chorus thinks of as too young to reign.

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Dost come all noble unto me all base,
One favour grant. I seek thy good, not mine.

Creon. And what request seek'st thou so wistfully?

Œdip. Cast me with all thy speed from out this land,
Where nevermore a man may speak to me!

Creon. Be sure, I would have done so, but I wished
To learn what now the God will bid us do.

Œdip. The oracle was surely clear enough 1440
That I the parricide, the pest, should die.

Creon. So ran the words. But in our present need
'Tis better to learn surely what to do.

Œdip. And will ye ask for one so vile as I?

Creon. Yea, thou, too, now would'st trust the voice of
God.

Œdip. And this I charge thee, yea, and supplicate ;
For her within, provide what tomb thou wilt,
For for thine own most meetly thou wilt care ;
But never let this city of my fathers 1450
Be sentenced to receive me as its guest ;
But suffer me on yon lone hills to dwell,
On my Kithæron, destined for my tomb,
While still I lived, by mother and by sire,
That I may die by those who sought to kill.
And yet this much I know, that no disease,
Nor aught else could have killed me ; ne'er from death
Had I been saved but for some evil dread.
As for our fate, let it go where it will ;
But for my children, of my boys, O Creon,
Take thou no thought ; as men they will not feel, 1460
Where'er they be, the lack of means to live.
But for my two poor girls, all desolate,
To whom my table never brought a meal
Without my presence, but whate'er I touched
They still partook of with me ;—care for these ;
Yea, let me touch them with my hands, and weep
With them my sorrows. Grant it, O my prince,

ŒDIPUS THE KING

O born of noble nature !

Could I but touch them with my hands, I feel
Still I should have them mine, as when I saw.

147

Enter ANTIGONE and ISMENE.

What say I ? What is this ?

Do I not hear, ye Gods, their dear, loved tones,
Broken with sobs, and Creon, pitying me,
Hath sent the dearest of my children to me ?
Is it not so ?

Creon. It is so. I am he who gives thee this,
Knowing the joy thou had'st in them of old.

Œdip. A blessing on thee ! May the Powers on high
Guard thy path better than they guarded mine !

Where are ye, O my children ? Come, oh, come

1480

To these your brother's hands, that now have brought

Your father's once bright eyes to this fell pass,

Who, O my children, blind and knowing nought,

Became your father e'en by her who bore me.

I weep for you, (for sight is mine no more,)

Picturing in mind the sad and dreary life

Which waits you at men's hands in years to come ;

For to what friendly gatherings will ye go,

Or solemn feasts, from whence, for all the joy

And pride, ye shall not home return in tears ?

1490

And when ye come to marriageable age,

Who is there, O my children, rash enough

To make his own the shame that then will fall,

Reproaches on my parents, and on yours ?

What evil fails us here ? Your father killed

His father, and was wed in incest foul

With her who bore him, and you twain begat

Of her who gave him birth. Such shame as this

Will men lay on you, and who then will dare

To make you his in marriage ? None, not one,

1500

My children ! but ye needs must waste away,

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Unwedded, childless. Thou, Menœkeus' son,
Since thou alone art left a father to them,
(For we their parents perish utterly,)
Suffer them not to wander husbandless,
Nor let thy kindred beg their daily bread,
Nor make them sharers with me in my woe ;
But look on them with pity, seeing them
At their age, but for thee, deprived of all.
O noble soul, I pray thee, touch my hand
In token of consent. And ye, my girls,
Had ye the minds to hearken I would fain
Give ye much counsel. As it is, pray for me
To live where'er is meet ; and for yourselves
A brighter life than his ye call your sire.

1510

Creon. Enough of tears. Go thou within the house.

Œdip. I needs must yield, however hard it be.

Creon. In their right season all things prosper best.

Œdip. Know'st thou my wish ?

Creon. Speak and I then shall know.

Œdip. That thou should'st send me far away from
home.

Creon. Thou askest what the Gods alone can give.

Œdip. As for the Gods, above all men they hate me.

Creon. And therefore it may chance thou gain'st thy
wish.

Œdip. And dost thou promise ?

1520

Creon. When I mean them not,

I am not wont to utter idle words.

Œdip. Lead me, then, hence.

Creon. Go thou, but leave the girls.

Œdip. Ah, take them not from me !

Creon. Thou must not think

To hold the sway in all things all thy life :

The sway thou had'st did not abide with thee.

Chor. Ye men of Thebes, behold this Œdipus,
Who knew the famous riddle and was noblest,

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Whose fortune who saw not with envious glances ?
And, lo ! in what a sea of direst trouble
He now is plunged. From hence the lesson learn ye,
To reckon no man happy till ye witness
The closing day ; until he pass the border
Which severs life from death, unscathed by sorrow.



ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS¹

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

ŒDIPUS.	CREON, <i>Prince of Thebes.</i>
ANTIGONE, } <i>Daughters of</i>	POLYNEIKES, <i>son of ŒDIPUS.</i>
ISMENE, } ŒDIPUS.	<i>Athenian Stranger.</i>
THESEUS, <i>King of Athens.</i>	<i>Messenger.</i>
<i>Chorus of Old Men of Colonos.</i>	

ARGUMENT.—When Œdipus was no longer king, and would fain have left Thebes for ever, the people suffered him not, for so the Oracle bade them. And his children grew up—two sons, Polyneikes and Eteocles, and two daughters, Ismene and Antigone, under Creon's care, and when his sons came to man's estate, and Œdipus had grown calmer, and content to abide in Thebes, they and Creon thrust him forth, a wanderer on the earth, lest he should bring trouble to the city. And many months he journeyed with Antigone over Hellas, begging their bread; but Ismene, though she loved him, stayed at home. And the two brothers quarrelled, and

¹ According to the received tradition (see *Introd.*, p. lxiv.), this tragedy takes its place as the poet's last work, and was not performed till his grandson, Sophocles, the son of Ariston, produced it after his death. On the conjectural grounds (1) that Theseus was intended to represent Pericles; and (2) that the inroad of Creon upon Attic soil is the presage of war with Thebes, and pointed to the early events of the Peloponnesian war, the time of composition has been fixed at B.C. 431, or 420, while the passages (919–937), which speak in friendlier tone, have been looked upon as inserted after Thrasybulos had rescued Athens from the Thirty by the help of the Thebans.

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Eteocles, the younger, drove forth Polyneikes, and made himself king. And Polyneikes betook himself to Argos, and took the king's daughter there in marriage, and gathered a great army wherewith to restore himself to the kingdom. And it chanced that Antigone and Œdipus came to Athens, where Theseus was then king, than whom no man in Hellas was braver or more just.

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

SCENE.—*Near ATHENS. The Acropolis in the distance to the right. In the foreground, a grove, fenced by a low stone wall, and on the left an equestrian statue of COLONOS.*

Enter ŒDIPUS and ANTIGONE.

Œdip. Child of a blind old man, Antigone,
What country reach we? Whose the city near?
Who will receive the wanderer, Œdipus,
And give him, day by day, his scanty needs?
He asks but little; than that little, less
Most times receiving, finding that enough:
For I have learnt contentment; chance and change
Have taught me this, and the long course of time,
And the stout heart within me. But, my child,
If that thou see'st a place where I may sit,
On common ground, or by the groves of Gods,
There place me; prop me up, that we may learn
Where now we are. As strangers we have come,
To learn from those that dwell as townsmen here,
And what we hear, in all completeness do.

Antig. My father, woe-worn Œdipus! afar,
If I see right, are towers that shield a town:¹
This spot is holy, one may clearly tell,
Full as it is of laurel, olive, vine,
And many a nightingale within sings sweetly.²

¹ The towers of the Acropolis are, as has been said, visible from Colonos.

² The laurel indicated consecration to Apollo, the olive to Athena, the vine to Dionysos.

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Rest thy limbs here upon this rough-hewn rock ;
Long hast thou travelled, for thine age, to-day. 21

Œdip. Place me then here, and o'er the blind man
watch. [She leads him to the seat.

Antig. I do not need to learn that lesson now.

Œdip. And can'st thou tell me where we take our
stand ?

Antig. Athens, I know ; but not this very spot.

Œdip. That every traveller told us, as we came.

Antig. But shall I go and ask what place it is ?

Œdip. Do so, my child, if men inhabit it.

Antig. Inhabitants there are ; and lo ! I think
I need not go. One passes by our way.

Œdip. And is he coming this way, hastening here ? 30

Antig. He is close by ; and what thou deem'st it right
To speak in season, say. The man is here.

Enter Athenian Stranger.

Œdip. My friend, from this girl hearing, who for me
And for herself doth see, that thou art come
A well-timed guide, to tell us where we doubt. . . .

Ath. Str. Before thou speakest further leave thy seat,
For here thou hold'st a place man may not tread.

Œdip. What is the place ? To what God consecrate ?

Ath. Str. Man comes not here, nor dwells. The God-
desses,

Dread daughters of the Earth and Darkness, claim it.¹ 40

Œdip. What solemn name should I invoke them with ?

Ath. Str. Eumenides, the Gentle Ones, all seeing,—
They call them here. It may be, other names
Befit them elsewhere.²

¹ The parentage thus assigned to the Erinnyes is significant as an instance of the tendency of Sophocles to drop the coarser forms of popular legends, such as we find as to their birth in the *Theogony* of Hesiod (l. 185), and to rise into loftier and purer thoughts.

² Historically the name Eumenides is said to have belonged to

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Œdip. May they then receive me,
Their suppliant, gently : thus I need not go,
Nor ever quit my station on their ground !

Ath. Str. What means this ?

'Tis the omen of my fate.

Ath. Str. And I, too, dare not move thee from thy
seat,

Without the state's command, before I tell
My tale, and learn what it is meet to do.

Œdip. By all the Gods, I charge thee scorn me not,
Poor wanderer though I be ! But what I ask 50
I pray thee tell.

Ath. Str. Speak, then, thou shalt not meet,
As far as my will goes, with scorn or shame.

Œdip. And what, then, is this place to which we've
come ?

Ath. Str. All that I know thou too shalt hear and
learn :

The ground all round is sacred, and the dread
Poseidon claims it, and the God of fire,
Titan Prometheus ;¹ and the place thou tread'st on
Is called the brass-paved threshold of our land,
Bulwark of Athens. And the neighbouring fields
Boast they have yon Colonos on his horse
To be their patron ; and they bear his name, 60
All called alike, in honour of their God.

Such, stranger, are our glories, not in words
Shown chiefly but much more by full resort.

Œdip. And are there any who inhabit here ?

Sleyon (Pausan. ii. 11, 4). In Attica they were the Σεμναί, or
Dread Ones. Appeased by the worship of the Athenians after the
acquittal of Orestes, the avenging Erinnyes became the kindly,
propitious Eumenides.

¹ Prometheus, as the guardian deity of the potters, and perhaps
also of the iron-founders, of Athens and Colonos. Torch-races in
his honour were run from his altar in the Academeia through the
Kerameikos to the city.

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Ath. Str. Ay, that there are, this God's great name who bear.

Œdip. Is there a chief, or do the people rule?

Ath. Str. Our city's king extends his sway to us.

Œdip. And who is this that rules in word and might?

Ath. Str. Theseus his name, the child of Ægeus old.

Œdip. Would one of you go fetch him here to me? ⁷⁰

Ath. Str. Simply to tell, or show him why to come?

Œdip. That he, a little helping, much may gain.

Ath. Str. And what help comes there from a man that's blind?

Œdip. The words we speak will see with open eyes.

Ath. Str. Know'st thou, my friend, in what way not to err,—

Noble, as one may see, but for the fate

That Heaven has laid on thee? Do thou stay here,

Here where I saw thee, while I go and tell

The townsmen on this very spot, not there,

Up in the city. They shall come and judge

If thou should'st tarry, or go back again. [*Exit.* ⁸⁰

Œdip. My child, and is the stranger gone from us?

Antig. He is gone, O my father. Thou may'st speak
In quiet all things; I alone am near.

Œdip. O dread and awful Beings, since to halt

On your ground first I bent my wearied limbs,

Be ye not harsh to Phœbos, and to me;

For He, when he proclaimed my many woes,

Told of this respite, after many years;

When I should reach the bourn of all my life,

That I should claim a stranger's place, and sit,

A suppliant at the shrine of dreaded Gods,¹

And then should near the goal of woe-worn life,

¹ The Oracle had spoken vaguely, and till now Œdipus had not known who the "dreaded Gods" were. The chance words of the stranger, telling him of the "dread" daughters of the earth and darkness, give him a new ray of hope.

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

To those who should receive me bringing gain ;
To those who sent me—yea, who drove me—evil ;
And that sure signs should give me pledge of this,
Earthquake, or thunder, or the flash of Zeus.
And now I know full well it cannot be
But faithful omen, sent to me by you,
To this grove brought me. Else I had not first,
Untasting wine, upon my way met you,
E'en you who loathe the wine-cup,¹ nor had sat 100
On this rough, hallowed seat. But, O ye Powers,
Grant me, according to Apollo's voice,
An issue and completion of my life ;
Unless it chance I seem too low for this,
Of all mankind the most enslaved to ills.
Come, ye sweet daughters of the Darkness old,
Come, O thou city bearing Pallas' name,
O Athens, of all cities most renowned,
Have pity on this wasted, spectral form
That once was Œdipus. No longer now
Is this my carcase what it was of old. 110

Antig. Hush ! for there come this way some reverend
men,

To ask the meaning of thy sitting here.

Œdip. I will be silent, and do thou convey
My feet within the grove, till I shall hear
What words they utter ; for in learning this
We gather caution in the things we do.

[*Retires with ANTIGONE into the grove.*]

Enter Chorus of Old Men of Colonos.

¹ The absence of wine from all libations made to the Erinnyes is presupposed as known even to the stranger, Œdipus. Later on (481), it comes prominently into the directions given him by the Chorus, but is received (with some slight inconsistency) with wonder.

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

STROPHE I¹

Chor. Look then ! Who was it ? Where his hiding place ?

Where has he fled and rushed,
Of all men boldest found ?

120

Look, search, seek everywhere.

A stranger—yea, a stranger must he be.

No countryman of ours, that blind old man ;

For never else had he
Approached the holy grove,
By foot of man untrod,

Where dwell the Virgin Ones invincible,

Whose names we fear to speak.

Yea, we pass by, and dare not raise our eyes,

130

Voiceless and speechless all,
Uttering the whispered sound
Of thought that fears to speak.

But now the rumour spreads
Of some one hither come,
Unmoved by touch of awe,

And yet around the precinct all in vain

I search, and fail to find

Where now his foot abides.

[ŒDIPUS shows himself.

Œdip. I am the man ; for by the voice I see,
As runs the adage.

Chor. Ah me ! ah me ! most dread to look upon, 140
Most dread to hear art thou.

Œdip. Do, not, I pray you, deem me a transgressor.

Chor. Great Zeus, our shield, who may this old man
be ?

Œdip. Not one to highest place
Of fair good fortune born,

¹ In the performance of the tragedy the eager cries, guesses, questionings of the Chorus were uttered by its members not together, but speaking one by one.

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Ye rulers of the land.
This show I all too plain, or had not crept,
Trusting to others' eyes,
Nor, mighty once, had come to harbour here
With anchors poor and weak.

ANTISTROPHE I

Chor. Ah me ! ah me ! and wast thou born, alas !
With those poor, sightless eyes ! 150
Worn out with many a woe,
And, as one well may guess,
Worn with age too ; but for my part, at least,
Thou shalt not bring fresh curses on thyself ;
Too far thou goest, too far.
But that thou rush not on
Through voiceless, grass-grown grove,
Where blends with rivulet of honeyed stream, 160
The cup of waters clear,
Of this beware, O man, weighed down with woe.
Bestir thyself, depart ;
The distance hinders us.
Hear'st thou, O wanderer worn ?
If thou my speech wilt heed,
Go forth from ground where man's foot may not go,
To where all walk alike.
Then speak ; till then abstain.

Œdip. [*To ANTIGONE.*] What turn should counsel take,
my child, in this ? 170

Antig. O father, we to citizens should give
Their due, and yield and hearken as is meet.

Œdip. Come, then, and touch me.

Antig. Here then is my hand.
[*She leads him out of the grove.*]

Œdip. So then, my friends, I pray,
Let me not suffer wrong,
Trusting thy plighted word,

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

And moving from my place.

Chor. No one from henceforth, 'gainst thy will, old man,
Shall lead thee from this spot.

Œdip. *[Pointing to a rock near them.]* Still farther on? 180

Chor. Yet onward take thy course.

Œdip. What! farther still?

Chor. *[To ANTIGONE.]* Lead him on, maiden, farther,
For thou discernest clear.

Antig. Follow then, follow, with thy sightless limbs,
My father, where I lead.

Chor. A stranger in a land that is not thine,
Endure, O suffering one,
To loathe whate'er our state doth hateful hold,
To reverence what it loves.

Œdip. Lead me then on, my child,
Where, on due reverence resting,
We may both speak and hear ;
Nor let us war with fate.

Chor. Stop here ; nor farther bend thy foot
Beyond this platform hewn from out the rock.

Œdip. Shall it be thus?

Chor. Enough, as now thou hearest.

Œdip. And may I sit?

Chor. Just leaning sideways here,
On the rock's edge sit low and bend thy knees.

Antig. This, father, be my task. With gentle tread,
Step after step advance ; *[ŒDIPUS groans.]*
Thy aged frame to my fond hand confide. 200

Œdip. Ah me! my weary fate!

Chor. O suffering one, since now thou givest way,
Speak. Who of mortals art thou?
Who art thou that art led thus miserable?
Thy country we would learn.

Œdip. I am an exile, friends ; but no ! not that——

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Chor. And why, old man, why shrinkest thou from that?

Œdip. No! no! let no one ask me who I am: 210

Search not, with over-curious, idle quest.

Chor. What means all this?

Œdip. My birth was terrible.

Chor. Yet tell it out!

Œdip. [To ANTIGONE.] What must I say, my child?

Chor. Tell us, O stranger, of what race thou com'st?

Œdip. Woe! woe! What sorrow comes on me, my child!

Antig. Tell them, for thou art in a sore strait now.

Œdip. Yea, I will speak. No hiding-place is left.

Chor. Ye linger long; make haste to tell thy tale.

Œdip. Know ye of Laios' son? 220

Chor. Ah woe! ah woe!

Œdip. The race of the Labdakidæ?

Chor. O Zeus!

Œdip. The wretched Œdipus?

Chor. And art thou he?

Œdip. Yet fear thou nothing, whatsoe'er I say.

Chor. Alas! alas!

Œdip. O miserable me!

Chor. Woe! woe!

Œdip. My daughter! what befalls us now?

Chor. Depart ye from our land!

Œdip. And wilt thou thus thy promise to us keep?

Chor. Vengeance comes not from Heaven on any man, 230

Avenging wrongs that men have done to him;

But fraud on this side meeting fraud on that,

Repays with pain, not kindness. Go, I say,

From this spot too; forth from my land depart,

Lest on my city some fresh ill thou bring.

Antig. O strangers, kind and pitiful of heart,

Since ye could not endure

To hear my aged father speak of crimes

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Done most unwillingly ;
 Have pity, I implore you, friends, on me,
 Who for my lonely father supplicate—
 Yea, supplicate, with eyes not blind and dark,
 Gazing on thine eyes, as a maiden might,
 Who common kindred claimed,
 That at your hands this old man, woe-begone,
 May find the pity that is born of awe.
 On you, as on a god, we rest our fate ;
 But grant, oh, grant me this unlooked-for boon.
 By all that is most dear, I supplicate,
 Thy child, thy wife, thy treasure, or thy God ;
 Search where thou wilt, thou ne'er wilt find a man
 With strength to 'scape when God shall lead him on.

Chor. Know, child of Œdipus, we pity thee,
 And him too, for your sad calamity ;
 But, fearing God, we may not dare to speak
 One word beyond the orders thou hast heard.

Œdip. What profit is there then of noble fame,
 Or fair report all idly floating on,
 If men can speak of Athens, most devout,
 The one deliverer of the stranger-guest,
 When wronged or injured, yea, his one support ?
 What is all this to me, whom ye did raise
 From where I stood, and then drive out by force,
 Fearing my name alone ? It cannot be
 Ye fear my presence or my deeds ; for they
 Were rather suffered by me than performed,
 If I must tell thee what befell my parents,
 On whose account thou dread'st me. This I know.
 And yet how was I base and vile of heart ?
 For I did but requite the wrongs I suffered,
 So that, not even had I done the deed
 With open eyes, should I be guilty found.
 But, as it was, I, knowing nothing, went
 Just where I went, while they who wronged me sought,

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Well knowing it, my death. And therefore, friends,
 I pray ye, by the Gods, as ye have raised me,
 So now deliver, nor, with outward show
 Honouring the Gods, then count the Gods as nought ;
 But think that they behold the godly soul,
 Beholding too the godless : never yet
 Was refuge found for impious child of man. 260
 And therefore shame not Athens, blest of God,
 Lending thy hands to any impious deeds ;
 But, as thou did'st receive me as a suppliant,
 And give me pledge of safety, free me now ;
 Free me and guard, and look not thou with scorn
 On this grey head, so foul to look upon.
 For I am come, as sacred, fearing God,
 Bringing this people profit. And your lord,
 When he shall come, whom ye your ruler call, 280
 Then thou shalt hear and know the whole. Meanwhile,
 Be not thou found as base in anything.

Chor. I needs must feel some shrinking as I hear,
 Old man, thy reasonings, for with no slight words
 Have they been uttered. 'Tis enough for me
 That they who rule us search the matter out.

Œdip. And where, my friends, is he who rules this
 land ?

Chor. He keeps his father's city. But the scout
 Who sent me here, is gone to summon him.

Œdip. And think ye he will any pity feel,
 Or care for me, the blind one, and will come ? 300

Chor. Right sure am I, when once he hears thy name.

Œdip. And who is he that will report it to him ?

Chor. The way is long ; but market news is wont
 To wander fast. And when he hears the news,
 Be of good cheer, he'll come. For know, old man,
 Thy name has come to all men, and though slow
 His speed at first, yet hearing, he will haste.

Œdip. And may he come with blessing to his country,

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

And to me also ! Who that lives is found
Unfriendly to himself ?

Antig. [*Starting.*] Zeus ! What is this ?
My father ! whither shall I turn my thoughts ?

310

Œdip. What is't, my child, Antigone ?

[*ISMENE is seen in the distance.*

Antig.

I see

Advancing near us, mounted on a colt
Of Ætna's breed, a woman's form. Her head
Is shaded by a broad Thessalian hat.¹

What shall I say ? . . . And can it be ? . . . 'Tis not.—

Does my mind cheat me ? Now 'tis yes, now no,
And what to say, O wretched me ! I know not.

And yet it is none else. With clear bright glance

320

Advancing she salutes me, and declares

It is mine own Ismene, no one else.

Œdip. What say'st thou, daughter ?

Antig.

That I see thy child,

My sister ; now her voice will bid thee know.

[*Enter ISMENE, followed by an Attendant.*

Ismene. O dearest one. My father and my sister !
Of all names sweetest. Hard it was to find,
And now for sorrow it is hard to see.

Œdip. Art thou then come ?

Ism.

Not easy was the way.

Œdip. Touch me, my child.

Ism.

I touch you both at once.

Œdip. Hast thou appeared ?

Ism.

O father, sad, most sad !

Œdip. O child, dear child !

¹ The "colt of Ætna's breed" was probably one of the mules for which Sicily was famous, and which were commonly used by women in travelling. The Thessalian hat, like the Roman *petasus*, was a low-crowned, broad-brimmed "wide-awake," worn by peasants and travellers.

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Ism. O lives of two-fold woe! 330

Œdip. Hers and mine, mean'st thou?

Ism. Yea, and mine the third!

Œdip. Why com'st thou, child?

Ism. In care for thee, my father!

Œdip. Did'st thou then yearn . . .?

Ism. I come to tell my tale,
With the one faithful servant that I had.

Œdip. Where are thy brothers, young and strong to
work?

Ism. E'en as they are. A fearful fate is theirs.

Œdip. Oh, like in all things, both in nature's bent,
And mode of life, to Egypt's evil ways,
Where men indoors sit weaving at the loom,
And wives outdoors must earn their daily bread. 340

Of you, my children, those who ought to toil,
Keep house at home, like maidens in their prime,
And ye, in their stead, wear yourselves to death,
For me and for my sorrows. She, since first
Her childhood's nurture ceased, and she grew strong,
Still wandering with me sadly evermore,
Leads the old man through many a wild wood's paths,
Hungry and footsore, threading on her way.

And many a storm and many a scorching sun 350
Bravely she bears, and little recks of home,
So that her father find his daily bread.

And thou, my child, before did'st come to me
All oracles to tell me (those Cadmeians
Not knowing of thy errand) which were given
Touching this feeble frame; and thou wast still
A faithful guardian, when from out the land
They drove me. And what tidings bring'st thou now,
Ismene, to thy father? What has led

Thy steps from home? for that thou com'st not idly,
Nor without cause for fear, I know full well. 360

Ism. The sufferings which I suffered, O my father,

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Tracking thy life where thou may'st chance to dwell,
 This I pass over, for I like not twice
 To grieve my soul, first bearing pain itself,
 And then relating. But I come to tell
 The ills that now thy wretched sons befall :
 Till now they were content to leave the throne
 To Creon, nor defile their country's fame,
 Bearing in mind the ancient taint of blood
 Which cleaves to all thy miserable house :
 But now, an evil spirit from the Gods,
 And their own mood of hate, have seized on them,
 Thrice miserable, to grasp at sovereignty
 And regal sway. And he, the youngest born,
 His elder brother Polyneikes robs
 Of kingly throne, and drives him from the land.
 And he, (for so reports come thick and fast,)
 An exile goes to Argos in the dale,
 There forms new ties, and gains a friendly host
 Of warriors round him, as if Argos meant,
 Or to bring low the plain of Cadmos old
 In conquest, or exalt its fame to heaven.
 These are no words, my father, no vain show,
 But fearful deeds. And I as yet know not
 What way the pity of the Gods will work.

Œdip. And had'st thou any hope the Gods would look
 On me with pity, and deliverance give ?

Ism. To me, at least, these oracles give hope.

Œdip. What oracles ? And what has been revealed ?

Ism. That the men there should seek to bring thee
 back,

Or dead or living, if they wish for safety.

Œdip. And who from such as I could safety gain ?

Ism. They say that all their power depends on thee.

Œdip. Am I a hero then, as good as dead ?

Ism. The Gods did vex thee once, they prosper now.

Œdip. 'Tis vain to prosper in his age a man

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

In youth low fallen.

Ism. Know that Creon comes

On this account, ere many days be past.

Œdip. With what intent, my daughter? Make this clear.

Ism. That they may place thee near Cadmeian ground,
And keep thee, but the borders of the land 400

Thou must not enter.

Œdip. And what help will come

From this my presence lying at their door?

Ism. Thy grave dishonoured brings disgrace on them.

Œdip. This one might know, without the voice of
God.

Ism. On this account they wish to have thee near
Their country, not where thou may'st roam at will.

Œdip. And will they cover me with Theban dust?

Ism. Thy father's blood makes that impossible.

Œdip. Then never shall they have me in their power!

Ism. Great sorrow to the Thebans will this bring.

Œdip. What chance or change shall bring that end to
pass? 410

Ism. Thy wrath, when they shall gather round thy
tomb.

Œdip. From whom heard'st thou, my child, the things
thou tell'st?

Ism. From men who went to seek the Delphic shrine.

Œdip. Has Phœbos then declared these things of us?

Ism. So said the men who thence returned to Thebes.

Œdip. Did either of my sons hear this report?

Ism. Both heard alike, and knew its gist right well.

Œdip. And did those vile ones, knowing this, prefer
The pride of power to all their love for me?

Ism. 'Tis pain to hear such words, . . . and yet I
bear them. 420

Œdip. O that the Gods might never lull to rest
The destined strife between them, and would grant

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

To me the end of all the deadly war
For which they lift the spear ! Then neither he
Who holds the sceptre and the throne should stay,
Nor he who now has left the city's gates
Return in peace. Lo ! they would none of me,
Their father that begat them, helped me not,
Thus poor, dishonoured, exiled ; but by them
I was sent forth an outlawed fugitive. 430
But thou wilt say, it may be, at my wish
My country rightly gave this boon to me.
Not so, not so, for on that self-same day,
When yet my thoughts were hot, and all my wish,
My one desire, to perish, stoned to death,
No man came forward then to help that wish ;
But later, when the sorrow had grown slack,
And I perceived my passion had outstripped
My former faults with lavish punishment,
Then did our state, for its part, drive me forth 440
Full late to exile. And my sons that might
Have helped their father, would not stir to act ;
And I, for lack of one small word, went roaming,
A beggar and a fugitive. And these,
Girls as they are, with such strength as they have,
Give me my daily food ; from them I gain
Rest without fear, and every kindly help.
But those two brothers chose, instead of me
Their father, kingly thrones and sceptred sway,
To play their parts as sovereigns in the land.
But never shall they make me their ally, 450
Nor from their rule o'er Thebes shall aught of good
For ever come. This know I, hearing both
The oracles she brings, and thinking o'er
Those older words that Phœbos brought on me.
Wherefore to seek me let them Creon send,
Or any man whose power the country owns.
For if ye will but stand, my friends, on guard,

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

With these thrice awful, dread Protectresses,¹
Then for your country's welfare ye shall gain
A great Deliverer, trouble to its foes.

460

Chor. Worthy of pity art thou, Œdipus ;
Both thou and these thy daughters. But as thou
Dost of this land proclaim thyself the saviour,
I wish to give thee counsel for thy good.

Œdip. Help me, true friend, as willing to do all.

Chor. Make thine atonement to these Powers, to whom
Thou camest first, profaning this their soil.

Œdip. After what fashion ? Tell me, O my friends.

Chor. First, offer from the ever-flowing stream
Libations sacred, lifting holy hands.²

470

Œdip. And when I take this pure and stainless
stream . . . ?

Chor. Vases there are, the work of skilful hands ;
Crown thou their rims and handles at the mouth.

Œdip. With fresh green boughs, or locks of wool, or
how ?

Chor. Around them twine a young lamb's snow-white
locks.

Œdip. So be it. And what then remains to do ?

Chor. Then pour libations turning to the East.

Œdip. And shall I pour with these same urns thou
tell'st of ?

480

Chor. Pour three libations, all at once the last. . . .

Œdip. With what shall I fill this ? Instruct me here.

Chor. Water and honey. Wine thou must not add.

Œdip. Why this, when vine-leaves shadow all the
land ?

¹ The Protectresses are, of course, the Eumenides. The great Deliverer is Apollo, whose favour the men of Colonos will gain by sheltering Œdipus.

² The ritual described is obviously that with which the poet had been familiar from his boyhood, as practised in the sacred grove of his deme. The vases are those which stood there for the use of all worshippers.

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Chor. Branches thrice nine of olive then place here,
On either hand ; then offer up these prayers.

Œdip. I fain would hear them. Crown of all are
they.

Chor. Eumenides, the Gentle Ones, we call them,
With gentle hearts receive and save your suppliant ;
Pray, both thyself, and some one in thy stead,
In low voice speaking, not in lengthened cry ;
Then, turning not, withdraw. If thou dost this, 490
I will stand by thee boldly ; else for thee,
O stranger friend, I should be full of fear.

Œdip. Hear ye, my children, what these townsmen
say ?

Antig. We hear. Do thou command us what is right.

Œdip. I may not go. Two evils press on me,
My failing strength and loss of power to see ;
Let one of you go on and do these things.
For one soul working in the strength of love
Is mightier than ten thousand to atone ;
But what ye do, do quickly. Only this 500
I ask you, leave me not. This feeble frame,
Bereaved of you, unguided cannot creep.

Ism. I go to do thy bidding. But the place
Which it is mine to seek, I fain would learn.

Chor. Beyond this grove, O maiden. And if still
Thou lackest aught, our townsman here shall tell thee.

Ism. I would go forth to this. Antigone,
Guard thou our father. For a parent's sake,
Though one may toil, one should the toil forget. [*Exit.* 510

Chor. To stir the buried evil of the past,
I know, is fearful ; yet I fain would ask——

Œdip. Of what ?

Chor. Of thy great sorrow, pitiful,
Grievous, perplexing, ever by thy side.

Œdip. By all thy ties of kindness, gentle friend,
Bid me not open deeds of foulest shame.

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Chor. The widespread rumour growing evermore,
I fain would hear, my friend, the truth in all.

Œdip. Woe ! woe !

Chor. Be patient, I beseech thee.

Œdip. Woe, woe is me !

Chor. Comply, as I have done with thy desire ! 520

**Œdip.* Full evil fortune have I borne, my friends,
*But all against my will ; for these, God knows,
Were none of them self-chosen.

Chor. How was this ?

Œdip. In shameful wedlock did my country join me
Who nothing knew, yea, in accursèd marriage.

Chor. And did'st thou, as I hear, thy mother's bed
Take as thine own, in shame ineffable ?

Œdip. Ah me ! 'tis death to me to hear it said,
O stranger ! And these children—they were born . . . 530

Chor. What sayest thou ?

Œdip. Two sorrows they were born. . . .

Chor. O Zeus !

Œdip. From the same womb to which I owed my
birth.

Chor. Are they thy daughters ?

Œdip. Yea, their father's sisters.

Chor. Ah woe !

Œdip. Ah woe ! ten thousand tangled ills . . .

Chor. Thou suffer'dst . . .

Œdip. Yes, I suffered fearful things.

Chor. And thou hast done . . .

Œdip. I have not done.

Chor. What then ?

Œdip. I did but take as gift what I, poor wretch, 540
Had, at my country's hands, not merited.

Chor. Poor sufferer, what but that ? And did'st thou
kill . . . ?

Œdip. What say'st thou now ? What wishest thou
to learn ?

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Chor. Thy father?

Œdip. Ah, thou strikest blow on blow.

Chor. Did'st slay him?

Œdip. Yea, I slew him; but in this . . .

Chor. What sayest thou?

Œdip. I have some plea of right.

Chor. How so?

Œdip. I'll tell thee. Not with knowledge clear
I smote and slew him; but I did the deed,
By law, not guilty, ignorant of all.

Chor. Lo, Theseus comes! great Ægeus' son, our king,
At thy request, to hear thy message to him. 550

Enter THESEUS.

Thes. Hearing from many, in the years gone by,
{The bloody mischief thou did'st do thine eyes,}
I know thee, son of Laios, who thou art;
And hearing, as I came, fresh news, discern
Yet more; for thee, thy weeds and suffering face
Declare too plainly; and, with pitying heart,
I wish to ask, unhappy Œdipus,
Why thou sitt'st here, a suppliant to my state,
And to me also,—thou, and that poor girl
Who still attends thee? Tell me; dread indeed
The suffering thou should'st tell, for me to hold 560
Myself aloof from it. Right well I know
That I myself was reared away from home,
As thou; and, more than most men, struggled through.¹
In a strange land, full many a risk of life.
So from no stranger, coming as thou com'st,
Would I draw back, or fail to help and save;
I know that I am man, and I can count
No more than thou, on what the morrow brings.

¹ Theseus, the Heracles of Attica, had been brought up, according to the myth, in Trœzen, and in returning to Athens across the Isthmus, had encountered many robbers and monsters.

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Œdip. Theseus, thy noble heart, with fewest words,
Permits me too to answer thee in brief; 570
For who I am, and of what father born,
And from what country come,—thou hast said all;
So that nought else remains but just to say
The things I wish for, and my tale is told.

Thes. Tell me then straightway, that I too may know.

Œdip. I come to give thee this poor feeble frame,
A sorry gift, uncomely to the sight.
But gain will come of it, that far outweighs
All outward beauty.

Thes. And what gain is this
Thou boastest that thou bring'st?

Œdip. In course of time
Thou shalt know all, but not this present hour. 580

Thes. And when shall this, the gain thou bring'st, be
clear?

Œdip. When I shall die, and thou shalt bury me.

Thes. Thou asketh life's last care; what comes between
Thou dost forget, or make of no account.

Œdip. For me this goeth hand in hand with that.

Thes. 'Tis a small thing thou ask'st, this boon of thine.

Œdip. Look to it well. Not small the conflict here.

Thes. Mean'st thou a conflict of thy townsmen with
me?

Œdip. Fain would they force me thither to return.

Thes. Against their will, it is not good to flee. 590

Œdip. Nay, but they never gave me what I wished.

Thes. O fool, in troubles passion profits not.

Œdip. Hear first, then counsel. Till then, let me be.

Thes. Instruct me; unadvised I would not speak.

Œdip. O Theseus, I have suffered ills on ills.

Thes. Speak'st thou of that old sorrow of thy house?

Œdip. Not so. That sorrow all th' Hellenes know.

Thes. What more than human woe weighs sore on
thee?

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Œdip. Thus is it with me. I was driven away
By mine own sons ; and never may I tread
My country's soil, my father's murderer.

600

Thes. Why should they fetch thee then, apart to dwell ?

Œdip. It is the voice of God constrains them to it.

Thes. What evil do the oracles forebode ?

Œdip. That they are doomed in this thy land to fall.

Thes. And how should strife spring up 'twixt them
and me ?

Œdip. O son of Ægeus, unto Gods alone
Nor age can come, nor destined hour of death.
All else the almighty Ruler, Time, sweeps on.
Earth's strength shall wither, wither strength of limb, ⁶¹⁰
And trust decays, and mistrust grows apace ;
And the same spirit lasts not among them
That once were friends, nor joineth state with state.
To these at once, to those in after years,
Sweet things grow bitter, then turn sweet again.
And what if now at Thebes all things run smooth
And well towards thee, Time, in myriad change,
A myriad nights and days brings forth ; and thus
In these, for some slight cause, they yet may spurn
In battle, all their pledge of faithfulness.¹ 620
And there this body, sleeping in the grave,
All cold and stiff, shall drink warm blood of men,
If Zeus be Zeus, and His son, Phœbos, true.
But, since it is ill done to speak of things
Best left unstirred, leave me where I began,
Thine own pledge keeping faithfully, and ne'er
Shalt thou have cause to say thou took'st me in,
Me, Œdipus, a guest unprofitable
To this thy land, unless the Gods deceive me.

Chor. Such words, my king, and others like to them,

¹ A possible reference to the political relations between Athens and Thebes at the commencement of the Peloponnesian war.

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Long since, this man has promised to perform.

639

Thes. Who then were bold enough to cast aside
His kindly feeling for a man like this,

Who may claim, first, the ancient mutual ties,
The open hearth of men allied in arms ;¹

And next, has come a suppliant of the Gods,
And to my land and me full tribute pays ?

These claims I reverence, and will not disown
My friendship for him ; but will welcome him
In this our land. And if it please our guest

Here to remain, I charge thee o'er him watch ;

But if to go with me shall please thee, Œdipus,

640

I leave it thy choice to go or stay,

As thou think'st best, myself content with that.

Œdip. O Zeus ! give blessings to such men as this !

Thes. What then desirest thou ? To go with me ?

Œdip. If it were lawful ; . . . But the place is
here. . . .

Thes. For what design ? Speak ! I will not oppose
thee.

Œdip. Where I shall conquer those who cast me
forth.

Thes. That were great boon for this thy stay with
us.

Œdip. If what thou say'st abides with thee in act.

Thes. Fear not as touching me ; I ne'er will fail thee.

Œdip. I bind thee not, like baser men, by oaths. 650

Thes. No more by that thou'dst gain than from my
word.

Œdip. How wilt thou act then ?

Thes. What alarms thee most ?

Œdip. Men will come here . . .

Thes. Let these take charge of them.

¹ Theseus acknowledges an old alliance between his own ancestors and the house of Labdacos, of which Œdipus, who had grown up at Corinth, naturally knows nothing.

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Œdip. Beware, in leaving me . . .

Thes. Nay, tell me not

What to beware.

Œdip. And yet I needs must, fearing . . .

Thes. Fear my heart knows not.

Œdip. Thou know'st not their threats.

Thes. But this I know, that no man of them all
Shall drag thee off from hence against my will.
Full many men have uttered many a threat
In random wrath, but when their mind is calm,
The threatenings vanish and are seen no more. 660
If they, perchance, waxed fierce, and spake big words
About thy going back, yet I know well
They'll find the sea full wide and rough for them.
I bid thee, then, apart from my resolve,
Take heart, if it was Phœbos sent thee here :
And, even in my absence this I know,
My very name will guard thee from all harm. [*Exit.*

STROPHE I

Chor. Of all the land far famed for goodly steeds,
Thou com'st, O stranger, to the noblest spot,
Colonos, glistening bright, 670
Where evermore, in thickets freshly green,
The clear-voiced nightingale
Still haunts, and pours her song,
By purpling ivy hid,
And the thick leafage sacred to the God,¹
With all its myriad fruits,
By mortal's foot untouched,
By sun's hot ray unscathed,

¹ The God to whom the ivy was sacred is first indicated by this attribute, then named as Dionysos. The Nymphs are those of Nysa, who first nursed him in his childhood, and then accompanied him in his wanderings.

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Sheltered from every blast ;
There wanders Dionysos evermore,
In full, wild revelry,
And waits upon the Nymphs who nursed his youth. 680

ANTISTROPHE I

And there, beneath the gentle dews of heaven,
The fair narcissus with its clustered bells
Blooms ever, day by day,
Of old the wreath of mightiest Goddesses ;¹
And crocus golden-eyed ;
And still unslumbering flow
Kephisos' wandering streams ;²
They fail not from their spring, but evermore,
Swift-rushing into birth,
Over the plain they sweep,
The land of broad, full breast,
With clear and stainless wave : 696
Nor do the Muses in their minstrel choirs,
Hold it in slight esteem,
Nor Aphrodite with her golden reins.³

¹ The poet, himself initiated in the mysteries of Eleusis, between which and the worship of Dionysos there was a close connexion, naturally sings of them. The "great Goddesses" are Demêter and Persephone. The narcissus and the crocus growing on the rocks were connected with the story of the capture of Persephone by Aidoneus (Pluto), who was said to have seized her as she was gathering these flowers, and therefore she and Demêter wore garlands of the ears of corn instead of wreaths of their blossoms.

² The streams of the Kephisos are still carried through many small channels, watering the fields and gardens of the peasants. And the local name (*Νομαί*) is all but identical with that by which Sophocles describes them.

³ Here, also, there is a reference to local sanctuaries. In the Academeia there was an altar to the Muses ; near its entrance one to Eros. It is permissible to trace something of a poet's serene complacency in the words which speak of the Muses as not slighting his own birthplace. The epithet "golden-reined" refers probably to some sculpture representing Aphrodite drawn by doves.

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

STROPHE II

And in it grows a marvel such as ne'er
On Asia's soil I heard,
Nor the great Dorian isle from Pelops named,¹
A plant self-sown, that knows
No touch of withering age,
Terror of hostile swords,
Which here on this our ground
Its high perfection gains,
The grey-green foliage of the olive-tree,²
Rearing a goodly race:
And never more shall man,
Or young, or bowed with years,
Give forth the fierce command,
And lay it low in dust.³
For lo! the eye of Zeus,
Zeus of our olive groves,
That sees eternally,
Casteth its glance thereon,
And she, Athena, with the clear, grey eyes.

ANTISTROPHE II

And yet another praise is mine to sing,
Gift of the mighty God
To this our city, mother of us all,
Her greatest, noblest boast,

¹ The anachronism which makes Œdipus anticipate the Dorian migration may be pardoned by those who remember that Shakespeare puts a quotation from Aristotle into the mouth of Hector.

² The first olive-tree had sprung up, according to Attic legends, in the Acropolis at the bidding of Athena. From it came that which was planted in the Academeia, and from that the holy olives (*μωρία*) which formed its groves, and were placed under the special guardianship of the Areopagos.

³ Among the legends of the Persian invasion, one was, that the olive in the Acropolis, the day after it had been burnt in the capture of the city, sent out a new and sturdy shoot. The "young" invader is probably Xerxes, the "old" Archidamos or Mardonios.

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Famed for her goodly steeds,
Famed for her bounding colts,
Famed for her sparkling sea.

Poseidon, son of Kronos, Lord and King,¹

To Thee this boast we owe,
For first in these our streets
Thou to the untamed horse
Did'st use the conquering bit:
And here the well-shaped oar,
By skilled hands deftly plied,
Still leapeth through the sea,
Following in wondrous guise,

The fair Nereids with their hundred feet.

Antig. O land, thus blest with praises that excel, 720

'Tis now thy task to prove these glories true.

[*CREON is seen approaching*

Œdip. What new thing happens, child?

Antig.

Creon comes

And comes, my father, not without an escort.

Œdip. Now, dear and honoured friends, of reverend
age,

In you is my one goal of safety found.

Chor. Take heart! Thou 'lt find it; old although
I be,

Our country's strength has not yet waxen old.

Enter CREON, attended by guards.

Creon. Ye worthy dwellers of this land, I see,
Your faces showing it, ye feel some fear
At this my sudden entry. Yet, I pray you, 730
Shrink ye not from me, speak no evil words,
For I am come with no design to act,
Seeing I too am old, and know that I

¹ As in the Acropolis, Athena was represented as giving the olive, and Poseidon the sea to the city, so here the patriot poet brings the two together as the joint benefactors of his country.

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Come to a city, great and powerful,
 As any is in Hellas. I was sent,
 Old as I am, this old man to persuade
 To follow me to yon Cadmeian plain,
 Not one man's envoy, but by all sent forth,
 Because by kinship it is mine to mourn,
 More than all others, this man's sufferings.
 And thou, O woe-worn Œdipus, list to me,
 And homeward turn. The whole Cadmeian race
 Invites thee heartily, I, most of all,
 Since most, unless I were of all men basest,
 I mourn, old man, for all thy many woes,
 Beholding thee in all thy misery,
 A stranger, and a wanderer evermore,
 And wanting still the very means of life.
 With one attendant, who, I never thought,
 Would come to such a depth of ignominy,
 As she, poor girl, has fallen to, who still,
 Caring for thee, and that poor face of thine,
 In beggar's guise lives on,—at her age too,
 Unsought in marriage, to the lust exposed
 Of any passing stranger. Woe is me !
 Is it not foul reproach of which I spake,
 Reproaching thee, and me, and all thy race ?
 Yet, since 'tis vain to hide what all men see,
 Do thou, by all my country's Gods, give ear,
 And list to me, O Œdipus, and hide them,
 As thou can'st do, if willing to return
 To thine own city, and thy father's house,
 To this state here a kindly farewell giving,
 For it is worthy. But thine own that nursed
 Thee long ago may claim yet more regard.

Œdip. O shameless one, all daring ! weaving still
 Some crafty scheme from every righteous word,
 Why triest thou again, and fain would'st take
 Me prisoner, where I most should grieve to be ?

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

For long ago, when I was mad with woe,
And I had joyed to leave the land for aye,
Thou would'st not grant this boon to me who asked ;
But when my wrath was sated, saner grown,
And it was pleasant to abide at home,
Then did'st thou thrust me, drive me out by force, 779
And kinship then had little weight with thee.
And now again, when thou dost see this state
Is friendly to me, it, and all its race,
Thou fain would'st drag me off, with glozing words
Hard purpose masking. But what profits it
To show thy love to men against their will ?
Just as if one, when thou did'st seek and beg,
Should give thee nought, nor even wish to help,
And when thy soul was filled with all thy wish,
Should give, when favour little favour wins.
Would'st thou not find this boon an empty show ? 780
Yet such the thing that thou dost offer me,
Goodly in show, yet mischievous in act.
These too I'll tell, that I may show thee base ;
Thou com'st to take me, not to take me home,
But on the borders of thy land to place me,
That so thy state from troubles may be freed,
Untouched by any evil from this land.
That shall not be ; but this shall be thy lot,
My stern Avenger dwelling with thee still ;
And those my sons shall gain of that my land
Enough to die in, that and nothing more. 790
Do not I wiser prove for Thebes than thou ?
Yea, far, as I more clearly hear the voice
Of Phœbos, and of Zeus who calls Him son ?
But here thy mouth has come with feignèd lips,
Speaking thy pointed words. Yet thou may'st reap
In this thy speech more evil far than good.
But since I know I move thee not, depart,
And leave us here in peace, for we should fare,

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

E'en as we are, not badly, being content.

Creon. Think'st thou I prosper less in what concerns thee, 800

Than thou in what concerns thyself, in this ?

Œdip. I am content, if thou dost not prevail,
Persuading me, or these my neighbours here.

Creon. O man ill-starred ! shall time not make thee wise ?

Wilt thou still bring to age such foul disgrace ?

Œdip. Thy gift of speech is wondrous ; but I know
None pleading well all causes, and yet just.

Creon. Much speech is one thing, well-timed speech another.

Œdip. Thy speech, of course, is brief and well-timed too.

Creon. Not so, to one whose wisdom is as thine. 810

Œdip. Go thou thy way, for in the name of these
I say it, watch me not with ill intent,
To plan attack where I should dwell in peace.

Creon. Not thee, but these I take as witnesses
What words thou giv'st thy friends ; should I seize thee. . . .

Œdip. And who will seize me, spite of these allies ?

Creon. Yet, without this, there's grief in store for thee.

Œdip. What act do these thy threatening words portend ?

Creon. Of thy two daughters one but now I seized,
And sent her off ; the other follows soon.

Œdip. Ah me ! [820

Creon. Full soon thou wilt have more to groan for.

Œdip. Hast thou my child ?

Creon. And this one too ere long.
[*Guards seize* ANTIGONE.]

Œdip. Ho ! friends, what do ye ? Will ye thus
betray me,
Nor drive this godless monster from your land ?

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Chor. Depart, O stranger, quickly ! Wrong the deed
Thou doest now ; wrong what thou did'st before.

Creon. [*To his guards.*] Now is your time, against her
will to seize her,

If with her own free will she goeth not.

Antig. Ah, wretched me ! And whither shall I fly ?
What help from Gods or mortals shall I find ?

Chor. What means this, stranger ?

Creon. Him I will not touch 830
But this girl's mine.

Œdip. O rulers of the land !

Chor. Not just, O stranger, are the deeds thou doest.

Creon. Nay, just are they.

Chor. How can'st thou call them just ?

Creon. I carry off mine own.

Œdip. Ho ! city ! to the rescue !

Chor. What means this, stranger ? Wilt not let her go ?
Soon thou wilt force me to the test of strength.

[*The Chorus try to rescue ANTIGONE.*]

Creon. Keep off, I tell thee.

Chor. Not while thou attemp'st
Such things as these.

Creon. If thou dost injure me,
Thou with my state wilt have to wage thy war.

Œdip. Did not I tell thee this ?

Chor. Let go thy hand
From off this maid !

Creon. Command not where thou'rt weak.

Chor. [*To one of CREON'S troops.*] I bid thee set her
free. 840

Creon. [*To the same.*] I bid thee go !

Chor. Come, neighbours, come ! Come hither to our
help :

Our state is injured, yes, our state. With might
Come hither, help !

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Antig. Ah, friends! ah, friends! they drag me,
wretched one!

Œdip. Where art thou, child?

Antig. Against my will I go.

Œdip. Stretch forth thine hands, my child.

Antig. No power have I.

Creon. [*To the guards.*] Will ye not lead her?

Œdip. Woe is me! all woe!

[*Guards carry off ANTIGONE.*]

Creon. No longer, then, on these props leaning, thou
Shalt travel onward. But since thou wilt thwart
Thy country and thy friends, at whose behest 850
I do these deeds, although myself a king,
Thwart us, if so it please thee. For, in time,
I know right well, thou'lt learn to see thyself
As neither now consulting thine own good,
Nor in the time that's past, when thou did'st act
Against the counsel of thy friends, and yield
To that fierce wrath that plagues thee ceaselessly.

[*Moves as if about to depart.*]

Chor. Hold there, my friend!

[*Advances towards CREON.*]

Creon. I tell thee, touch me not.

Chor. Though robbed of these, I will not let thee go.

Creon. Thou'lt make thy state a larger ransom pay,
For not on these alone I lay my hand.

Chor. What mean'st thou then?

Creon. Him also will I take! 880

Chor. Thy words are big.

Creon. Yet it shall soon be done,
Unless the ruler of this land forbid me.

Œdip. O shameful threat! Shalt thou lay hands on
me?

Creon. Silence, I charge thee!

Œdip. May these Goddess-Powers
Not smite me speechless till I speak my curse

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

On thee, thou vile one, robbing me by force
Of that last light, when other lights were quenched.
For this may yon bright Son-god, scanning all,
Grant thee thyself, and all thy race with thee,
To wear thy life in dreary age like mine. 870

Creon. See ye these things, ye dwellers in this land?

Œdip. They see both me and thee, and judge that I,
Wronged by thy deeds, by words defend myself.

Creon. I'll check my wrath no more. Although alone,
And worn with age, I'll lead him hence by force.

Œdip. Ah, wretched me!

Chor. Thy pride is great, my friend,
If that thou thinkest thus to work thy will.

Creon. And yet I think it.

Chor. Then our country's lost.

Creon. In a just cause the weak o'erpowers the
strong. 880

Œdip. Hear ye what things he utters?

Chor. Things which he
Shall ne'er accomplish!

Creon. Zeus knows that, not thou!

Chor. And is not this an outrage?

Creon. Outrage! aye;
Still thou must bear it!

Chor. Ho! ye people, come!
Ye rulers of this land come quickly—haste!
These men are getting far upon their way.

Enter THESEUS, followed by Athenians.

Thes. What means this cry? What do ye? What ill
fearing

Have ye thus stopped me in the act of slaughter,
Even at the altar, to the God of Ocean,
Guardian of this Colonos? Tell your tale out,
That I may know why I have rushed in haste thus,
With greater speed than one would walk for pleasure. 890

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Œdip. O dearest friend !—for well I know thy voice—
At this man's hands I suffer fearful wrongs.

Theb. What are they ? Who has injured thee ? Speak
on !

Œdip. This Creon, whom thou seest, has torn from
me

The only pair that I as children claim.

Theb. How say'st thou ?

Œdip. What I suffer thou hast heard.

Theb. Let some one, then, to yonder altars go
With utmost speed to summon all the people,
Both horse and foot, to hasten, tarrying not
For sacrifice, with loosened rein, and meet
Where the two paths of travellers converge,¹
Lest those two maidens slip from out our hands,
And I, outdone, become a laughing-stock
To him, this stranger. Go, I bid you, quickly.
And as for him, if I were wroth with him,
E'en as he merits, he should not depart
Unhurt from me ; but with the self-same laws
With which he came shall he be recompensed,
Those and no others. [*To CREON.*] Never shalt thou
stir

From out this land until before mine eyes
Thou place those maidens. Thou dost grievous wrong
To thine own self, thy fathers, and thy country,
Who, coming to a state that loves the right,
And without law does nothing, sett'st at nought
The things it most reveres, and rushing in,
Tak'st what thou wilt, with deeds of violence.
Thou must have deemed my city void of men,
Slave-like, submissive, and myself as nought.
And yet it was not Thebes that made thee base :
'Tis not her wont to rear unrighteous men ;
Nor would'st thou win her praise, if she should hear

¹ The two roads, one leading to Eleusis, the other the Pythian.

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Thou tramplest on my rights, defiest Gods,
 And rudely seizest these poor suppliants.
 I truly, had I entered on thy land,
 Although my cause were justest of the just,
 Would not, without the ruler of the land,
 Be he who may, have seized or led away ;
 But should have known what way I ought to live,
 A stranger sojourning with citizens.
 But thou dost shame a city which deserves
 A better fate,—thine own ; and time's full course,
 Making thee old, has robbed thee of thy mind.
 I told thee this before, and tell thee now,
 To bring the girls as quickly as thou can'st,
 Unless thou fain would'st live an alien here,
 By force, against thy will. And this I say,
 With all my soul, as well as with my tongue.

Chor. See'st thou, O stranger, how the case doth
 stand ?

Just by thy birth and fame, thy deeds are wrong.

Creon. Not that I count this city void of men,
 (I use thy words, O son of Ægeus old,)
 Nor void of counsel, have I done this deed,
 Well knowing that no zeal for those my kindred
 Would ever lead it to receive them here
 In spite of my commands. I also knew
 Ye ne'er would shield a parricide impure,
Nor one whose marriage was an incest foul ;
 I knew that in this land a Council met
 Upon the hill of Ares, wise and good,
 Which suffers not such wanderers to dwell
 Within their city. Trusting this report,
 I ventured on this seizure. Yet e'en thus
 I had not done it, but he heaped his curse
 On me and on my house, and, suffering thus,
 I claimed the right of rendering ill for ill,
 [For headstrong wrath knows no old age but death ;

930

940

950

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

The dead are callous to the touch of pain.]
Wherefore do what thou wilt, for though I speak
With justice on my side, yet being alone,
But little power is left me. Yet thy deeds
Old as I am I'll strive to render back.

Œdip. O shameless soul! on which, think'st thou, thy
scorn 960

Will fall most heavily, my age or thine?
Who with thy lips dost tell the goodly tale,
Of murders, incests, sad calamities,
Which I, poor wretch, against my will endured;
For thus it pleased the Gods, incensed, perhaps,
Against my father's house for guilt of old.
For, as regards my life, thou could'st not find
One spot of guilt, in recompense for which
I sinned these sins against myself and mine.
Tell me, I pray, if God-sent oracles
Declared his son's hand should my father slay, 970
How could'st thou justly heap reproach on me,
Who had no nurture at my father's hands,
Nor at my mother's, but, as one self-grown,
Rose then to manhood? Or, if once again,
Born, as I was, to misery and shame,
I with my father came to blows, and slew him,
Not knowing what I did, or unto whom;
How can'st thou rightly blame th' unconscious sin?
And thou, all shameless, blushest not to force
My lips to speak of marriage with my mother,
With her who was thy sister. I will speak
Of these things quickly, will not hold my peace.
Since thou hast ventured on such hateful speech. 980
She bore me; yes, she bore me—(woe is me!)
Unknowing, bearing me who knew her not;
And having borne, to me she issue gave,
Her shame and her reproach. But this I know,
That thou of thy free will speak'st foulest words

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Against her name and mine, while I, against
My will espoused her, and against my will
Now speak these things. And yet my name shall bear
No evil brand by reason of that marriage,
Nor for my father's death that thou still harp'st on, 990
With bitter words of shame reproaching me.

Just answer then this question that I ask :
If one should seek to slay thee here and now,
Thee, the famed just one, would'st thou stay to ask
If 'twere thy father's hand that aimed the blow,
Or would'st thou straightway parry it? I think,
As thou lov'st life, thou would'st requite thy foe,
And would'st not look so narrowly at right ;
Such ills, at any rate, were those I fell on,
The Gods still leading me ; nor can I think
My father's soul, if it returned to life,
Would plead against me here. But thou think'st fit,—
Since just thou'rt not, as one who deems it right 1000
To speak of all things, whether fit for speech
Or things which none may utter,—before these
To heap reproach on me. And Theseus' name
It suits thee well to flatter, and to speak
Of Athens, and her goodly polity ;
And yet thus praising, thou forgettest this,
That she, if any land reveres the Gods,
In this excels ; and yet from her thou dar'st
To steal a suppliant, grey and hoar with age,
And those two maidens hast already taken.
And for these deeds, these Goddess-Powers I call 1010
And supplicate, and weary with my prayers,
To come as helpers and allies, that thou
May'st learn their mettle who this land defend.

Chor. The man, O king, speaks nobly, and his woes
Are grievous, and they call us to assist him.

Thes. Enough of words, for they who snatched their
prey

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Haste on, while we who suffer wrong stand still.

Creon. What orders giv'st thou to a man defenceless ?

Thes. That thou should'st lead the way, and I should go

Thy escort, so that if thou hast his girls
 Within our borders, thou may'st show them me ;
 But if they get beyond, we need not toil ;
 For there are others, hastening to pursue,
 And those who flee shall never thank the Gods
 As 'scaped from this our land : but lead thou on,
 And know that thou who hold'st thy prey art held,
 And chance has caught thee, hunter as thou art ;
 For gains, ill gotten by a fraud unjust,
 Can never prosper. And another's help
 Thou shalt not have in this, for well I know
 Thou had'st not ventured on so great a wrong
 Alone, unbacked, but there is some one else,
 Trusting to whom thou did'st it. And for me,
 I must look well to this : nor leave my state
 By one man conquered, weak and powerless.
 Regard'st thou aught of this, or seems it vain,
 Both now, and when thou planned'st these thy
 schemes ?

1020

1030

Creon. While thou speak'st here, I fault with nothing
 find ;

When we reach home, we shall know what to do.

Thes. Go on and threaten. Thou, O Œdipus,
 Stay here in peace and comfort, trusting me
 That I, unless I die, will never rest,
 Before I give thy children to thy hands.

1040

Œdip. God bless thee, Theseus, for thy noble heart,
 And all thy just and generous care for us.

[*Exeunt THESEUS and Athenians, with CREON
 and his guards.*]

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

STROPHE I

Chor. Ah! would that I were there¹
Where onset fierce of men
Arrayed for fight shall join
In brazen-throated war;
Or at the Pythian fane,
Or by the torch-lit shores,²
Where awful Powers still watch,
O'er solemn rites for men of mortal race;
Whose golden key is set upon the lips
Of priests, Eumolpidæ, who tend their shrine.
There, so I deem, will meet
Our Theseus, brave in fight,
And those two sisters, proof
Against all toil and pain,
Will meet on this our land,
With cry, that uttereth all their hearts' desire.

1080

ANTISTROPHE I

Or else, perchance, they cross
The side that westward slopes
Of yonder snow-crowned height,
On to Œeatis' lawns,³

1080

¹ As in the last ode, so here, the scenery of Attica is brought before us. Theseus had given orders that his troop should hasten to the meeting-point of the Eleusinian and Pythian roads, and the Chorus conjectures what may have happened on either of them. The "Pythian fane" was a temple of Apollo Pythios, in a pass of the Ægalean hills.

² The "torch-lit shores" are those of Eleusis, where night-festivals were held by torch-light to commemorate Demêter's search for Persephone. These two Goddesses are the "awful Powers," the "solemn rites" are the Eleusinian mysteries. The "golden key," as a symbol of silence, was laid by the priests of the house of Eumolpos, upon the lips of the initiated. Here the Eumolpidæ themselves are represented as sworn to secrecy.

³ The "snow-crowned height" is probably Mount Geraneia, between Megaris and Corinth. Ægaleos in Attica has been conjectured, but is less suitable.

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Speeding on goodly steeds,
Or race of chariots swift ;
Yes, they will take their prey,
For terrible our townsmen's strength for war,
And terrible the might of Theseus' sons.
For every horse's curb is gleaming bright,
And all that sit their steeds
Rush forth with loosened reins,
Who at Athena's shrine,
Where on her steed she sits,
Bow down, or homage pay
To Rhea's son, the sea-God, ruling earth.

1070

STROPHE II

Strike they or do they linger ? Shadowy hopes
Come on my soul, that he
Perchance surrenders now
The maiden who hath borne
Full many a grief, and many a wrong endured
At her own kinsmen's hands.
Yes, Zeus this day will work, will work His way ;
Prophet of brave deeds I.
Ah would that I, a dove on pinions swift,
Might gain some cloud that floats in æther clear,
And glad my longing eyes
With sight of this fierce conflict of the brave.

1080

ANTISTROPHE II

O Zeus ! thou Lord omnipotent of Gods,
Who all on earth beholdest,
Grant that our country's chiefs,
With strength for victory,
May lay their ambush, and may seize their prey ;
And thou, O child of Zeus,
Pallas, Athena ; thou too huntsman-God ;
Apollo, in thy strength,

1090

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

And she, thy sister, following evermore
Swift-footed antelopes with dappled skin ;

I pray you come and help
Doubly, this land, and its inhabitants.

[THESEUS *is seen approaching with* ANTIGONE
and ISMENE.

Chor. O way-worn stranger, thou wilt not reproach
Thy watchman as false prophet, for I see
These maidens now approaching us once more.

Œdip. Where? where? How say'st thou?

Antig. [*Rushing to ŒDIPUS.*] My father, O my father!
Oh! that some God would grant thee but to see 1100
This best of men who brings us back to thee.

Œdip. Are you both here, my child?

Antig. Yes, Theseus' hands
And those of his dear comrades rescued us.

Œdip. My child, draw near thy father, give to me
To clasp the form I little hoped would come.

Antig. Thou shalt have what thou ask'st. That boon
thou seek'st
Is what we yearn for.

Œdip. Where then, where are ye?

Antig. Together, close to thee.

Œdip. O dearest offspring!

Antig. Dear to a father is each child of his.

Œdip. Props of my age are ye!

Antig. Sad age, sad props.

Œdip. I have you then, ye dear ones, nor would
death 1110

Be wholly dreary, ye twain standing near.
Support me, then, on this side and on that,
Close clinging to your father. Rest awhile
From all the sad lone wanderings of the past,
And tell me briefly how the deed was done,
For at your age the fewest words are best.

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Antig. Here is the man who saved us; hear thou him,

Whose is the deed, and then my task is light.

Œdip. [*To THESEUS.*] Oh, wonder not, my friend, if I prolong

My tedious speech, now these, beyond my hopes, 1120

*Appear again; for well I know this joy

To me has come from no one else but thee;

For thou hast saved them, thou, and only thou;

And may the Gods grant all that I could wish

To thee and to thy land. For I have found

Here only among men the fear of God,

The mood of kindness, and the truthful word;

And knowing this, I pay it back with thanks;

For what I have, I have through thee alone.

And now, O prince, I pray, thy right hand give, 1130

That I may grasp it, and, if that may be,

Kiss thy dear brow. And yet, how dare I ask?

Why should I wish, all foul and miserable,

To touch a man upon whose soul there dwells

No taint of evil? No! I will not ask,

I will not let thee do it. They alone

Can feel for mourners who themselves have mourned.

Farewell, then, where thou art; from henceforth care

For me as well as thou hast cared to-day.

Thes. Not though thy words were lengthened out yet more,

For joy of these thy daughters, should I marvel, 1140

Nor if their words thou should'st prefer to mine.

[No pain or grievance touches me in this;]

For it is still my care to make my life,

Nor by my words illustrious, but by deeds.

And thus I prove it: of the things I swore

In nothing have I failed; these girls I bring

Alive, unscathed by all the threatened harm.

And how the fight was won what need to boast

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

All idly, when their lips shall tell thee all ?
 But for the news that met me as I came, 1150
 Just now, take counsel. Short enough to tell,
 It yet is passing strange. And one should learn,
 Being man, to think no scorn of aught that is.

Œdip. What is this, son of Ægeus? Speak, I pray ;
 For I know nothing of the things thou ask'st.

Thes. They say that some one near of kin to thee,
 Yet not from Thebes, thy city, suppliant sits
 Close by Poseidon's altar, where it chanced,
 When summoned here, I offered sacrifice.

Œdip. What kind of man was he? and seeking what 1160
 By this his suppliant posture?

Thes. Nought I know
 But this ; he asks, they tell me, short discourse
 With thee, no heavy burden.

Œdip. What is this ?
 Of no light import is this suppliant's prayer.

Thes. They say he asks to come and speak with thee,
 And then return in safety as he came.

Œdip. Who can it be that asks a boon like this?

Thes. Think if at Argos any kinsman dwells
 Who might desire to gain this boon from thee.

Œdip. Stop, dearest friend, I pray.

Thes. What aileth thee?

Œdip. Ask it not of me !

Thes. Ask not what? Say on. 1170

Œdip. I know too well, from what these girls have
 told me,

Who this strange suppliant is.

Thes. And who is he,
 That I should charge the man with any fault?

Œdip. My son, O prince, from whom of all that
 live,

I could least bear to hear the sound of speech.

Thes. Why so? Hast thou not power to hear, nor do

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

The things thou would'st not? Why should hearing
pain thee?

Œdip. That voice is hateful to a father's ear;
I pray thee, prince, constrain me not to yield.

Thes. But if his rights as suppliant should constrain us,
Take heed that thou shew reverence for our God. 1180

Antig. My father, be persuaded, though I speak
But a girl's counsel. Suffer thou this friend,
E'en as he wills, to do as conscience prompts,
And as his God demands. And grant to us
That this our brother come; for, take good heart,
He shall not draw thee on against thy judgment
With words which are not fitting. What the harm
To list to words? Yea, evil deeds and plots
By words disclose themselves. He is thy child;
And therefore, O my father, 'tis not right.
Although his deeds to thee be basest, vilest, 1190
To render ill for ill. But let him come;
Others ere now have thankless offspring reared,
And bitter wrath have felt; but they, with spells
Of friends' good counsel, charmed their souls to peace.
Look not upon the present but the past,
Thy father's and thy mother's woes, and thou,
I know full well, wilt see that evil mood
An evil issue finds for evermore;
For strong the proofs thou hast within thyself,
In those poor sightless eyeballs. Nay, but yield— 1200
Yield thou to us. It is not good to meet
With stiff denials those who ask for right;
Nor, having met with good at others' hands,
To fail in rendering good for good received.

Œdip. Your words prevail, my child, and yet your joy
To me is grievous. Be it as you will:
Only, my friend, if he should hither come,
Let no one get the mastery of my life.

Thes. I wish to hear those words but once, old friend,

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Not twice renewed. I am not wont to boast ;
But know thou'rt safe, if any God saves me. [*Exit.* 1210]

STROPHE

Chor. He who seeks length of life,
Slighting the middle path,
Shall seem, to me at least,
As brooding o'er vain dreams.
Still the long days have brought
Griefs near, and nearer yet.
And joys—thou canst not see
One trace of what they were ;
When a man passeth on
To length of days beyond the rightful bourne ;
*But lo, the helper comes that comes to all, 1220
*When doom of Hades looms upon his sight,
The bridegroom's joy all gone,
The lyre all silent now,
The choral music hushed,
Death comes at last.

ANTISTROPHE

Happiest beyond compare
Never to taste of life ;
Happiest in order next,
Being born, with quickest speed
Thither again to turn
From whence we came.
When youth hath passed away,
With all its follies light, 1230
What sorrow is not there ?
*What trouble then is absent from our lot ?
Murders, strifes, wars, and wrath, and jealousy,
And, closing life's long course, the last and worst.
An age of weak caprice,
Friendless, and hard of speech,

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Where, met in union strange,
Dwell ills on ills.

EPODE

And here this woe-worn one
(Not I alone) is found ;
As some far northern shore, 1240
Smitten by ceaseless waves,
Is lashed by every wind ;
So ever-haunting woes,
Surging in billows fierce,
Lash him from crown to base ;
Some from the westering sun,
Some from the eastern dawn,
These, from the noontide south,
Those, from the midnight of Rhipæan hills.¹

Antig. And here, my father, so it seems, he comes,
The stranger, all alone, and, as he walks, 1250
He sheds a flood of tears incessantly.

Œdip. Who is this man ?

Antig. He, who this long time past
We thought and spoke of, Polyneikes, comes.

Enter POLYNEIKES.

Polyn. What shall I do, ah me! . . . mine ills bewail,
My sisters, or shed tears for what I see
My aged father suffering? I have found
Both him and you in strange land wandering ;
And this his garb, whose time-worn squalidness
Matches the time-worn face, and makes the form 1260
All foul to look on, and his uncombed hair,
Tossed by the breeze, falls o'er his sightless brow.
And she, my sister, as it seems, provides
For this poor life its daily sustenance.

¹ The Rhipæan hills, thought of as in the far north of Skythia, were to the Greeks as a region of clouds and thick darkness, sending forth the chilling blasts (ρίται) of the North.

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

All this I learn too late, me miserable !
And now, I bear my witness that I come,
As to thy keeping, basest of the base :
Learn not my faults from others. But since there,
Sharing the throne of Zeus, Compassion dwells,
Regarding all our deeds ; so let it come
And dwell with thee, my father. For our faults
We shall find healing, more we cannot add.
Why art thou silent ?——Speak, my father, speak ; 1270
Turn not away.——And wilt thou answer nought,
But send'st me back dishonoured ?——Voiceless still ?
Not speaking e'en the matter of thy wrath !
And ye, his children, ye, my sisters, strive
To ope your father's sealed and stubborn lips
That he reject me not, thus scorned and shamed,
(God's suppliant too) not one word answering.

Antig. Say, thou thyself, poor sufferer, what thou
need'st, 1280

For many words, or giving sense of joy,
Or stirring anger, or the touch of pity,
Have from the speechless drawn forth speech at last.

Polyn. Well, I will tell thee. Thou dost guide me
well ;

First, calling on the God to give me help,
Bowed at whose shrine, the ruler of this land
Raised me, and brought me hither, granting me
To speak and hear, and safely to depart :
And this I wish, my friends, from you to gain,
And from my sisters, and my father here. 1290
And why I came, my father, now I'll tell thee.
Behold me exiled from my fatherland,
Driven forth, because I claimed by right of age
To sit upon thy throne of sovereignty.
And so Eteocles, though younger born,
Hath thrust me forth, not baffling me in speech,
Nor coming to the test of strength and deed,

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

But winning o'er the state. Of this, I say,
Thy dread Erinnyes is the chiefest cause ;
And next, I hear thus much by prophets told : 1300
For when I came to Argos, Dorian named,
Making the daughter of Adrastus mine,
I gathered as confederates in my cause,
All who are chiefest in the Apian land,¹
Renowned in battle, that this armament,
With seven great chiefs, might follow me to Thebes,
And I might either die a noble death,
Or drive to exile those who did me wrong.
Well then, what chance has brought me hitherward ?
This, O my father. With a suppliant's prayers
Both for myself, and my allies, I come, 1310
The seven great armies by seven captains led,
That gird the plain of Thebes. And first, there comes
Amphiaraus, wielding mighty spear,
Supreme in war, supreme in auguries ;
Then next in order, the Ætolian son
Of Œneus, Tydeus named ; and Argive born,
Eteoclos the third ; Hippomedon,
By Talaos sent, the fourth ; and Capaneus
The fifth, boasts loud that he with fiery blaze,
Will soon lay waste the citadel of Thebes,
And utterly destroy it. Sixth, there comes 1320
Parthenopæos, the Arcadian, named
From his chaste mother, true and worthy son
Of Atalanta. And I, last, thy son,
Or if not thine, the child of evil Fate,
Yet known as thine, I lead the Argive host
Undaunted, against Thebes. And all of us,
By these thy children, and thy life, my father,
With one accord entreat thee, and implore
To let thy mood of wrath give way to him

¹ Apian land, *sc.*, the Peloponnesus, so named, mythically, from Apis, the son of Apollo, who freed it from wild beasts and monsters.

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Who stands before thee, hastening to chastise
 The brother who deprived me of my home,
 And robbed me of my country. This we ask,
 For if there be aught true in oracles,
 They say the side thou cleavest to will win ;
 Wherefore, by all the fountains of thy home,
 And all thy household Gods, I pray thee yield.
 Poor and in exile we, in exile thou,
 And thou and I, the same ill fortune sharing,
 Live, hangers-on on others, while, alas !
 The despot lord at home, in pride of state
 Mocks at us both ; but I, if thou wilt join
 Thy mind with mine, will scatter all his might,
 Without much waste of trouble or of time,
 And so will bring thee to thy home once more,
 Stablish myself, and cast him out by force.
 And this, if thou consent, 'tis mine to boast :
 Without thee I've no strength to save myself.

1320

1340

Chor. For his sake, Œdipus, who sent him here,
 Send the man back, with answer as seems fit.

Œdip. Were it not so, my friends, that he who rules
 This land had sent him, Theseus, asking me
 To let him hear my words, no voice of mine
 His ears had heard. But now he shall go forth
 Gaining his end, and hearing words from me
 Which never shall bring gladness to his life.
 For thou, thou vile one, having in thy hands
 The thrones and sceptre which thy brother has,
 Who rules in Thebes, did'st drive thy father forth,
 And mad'st him homeless, wearing weeds like these,
 Which now thou weep'st to look on, when in grief
 Like mine thou too art fallen. These are things
 I may not weep for : I must bear them still,
 While life lasts, counting thee my murderer ;
 For thou wast he who plunged me in this woe ;
 Thou drov'st me into exile ; by thy deed,

1350

1360

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

A wanderer through the world, I beg my bread,
And had I not these girls to care for me,
That too would fail, for aught that thou would'st do.
But now they save my life ; they tend on me ;
No women they, but men in will to toil :
But ye are not my sons ; I own ye not.
As yet the God forbears to look on thee, 1370
As soon He shall, if these thy armies move
Against the towers of Thebes. It may not be
That thou shalt ever lay that city waste,
But thou thyself shalt fall, with blood defiled ;
And so shall fall thy brother. Once before
I breathed these curses deep upon you both,
And now I bid them come as my allies,
That ye may learn the reverence due from sons,
Nor, being what you are, think scorn of me,
Your blind old father ; (these thou look'st on here
Have done far other deeds ;) and therefore they,
Those Curses, sway thy prayers, thy sovereignty, 1380
If still there dwells beside the throne of Zeus
The Eternal Right that rests on oldest laws ;
And thou—may ruin seize thee, loathed and base !
I am no more thy father ; take my curse
Which now I pour on thee, thy native land
Never by sword to conquer, nor again
Return to Argos in the dale, but die,
Slain by a brother's hand, and slaying him
Who drove thee forth to exile. So I curse
And call on that drear dark of Tartaros,
My father's home, to snatch thee from the earth, 1390
And call on these dread Powers, and I invoke
Ares who stirred this fearful hate in you.
Hear this, and go thy way ! And then proclaim
To all the race of Cadmos, and to those
Thy true allies, that Œdipus has left
To both his sons, such legacies as these.

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Chor. I cannot wish thee joy of thy late journey,
O Polyneikes ! and I bid thee turn
At once with fullest speed, thy backward way.

Polyn. Woe, then, for all my wandering, all my failure.
Woe, too, for all my friends. Is this the goal 1400
For which from Argos starting, (wretched me !)
We hither came ? an end I dare not tell
To any of my friends, nor turn them back ;
But needs must meet my fate without a word.
But O my sisters, ye—for ye have heard
My father's bitter curse—I charge you both,
If these dire curses find fulfilment dread,
And it is given you homeward to return,
Do not ye scorn me : give me honours meet,
A seemly burial, decent funeral rites ; 1410
And this your praise, which now ye get from him
For whom ye labour, other praise shall bear,
No whit inferior, for your love to me.

Antig. I pray thee, Polyneikes, yield to me.

Polyn. In what, thou dear Antigone ? Speak on.

Antig. Lead back thy host to Argos, slackening not,
Nor ruin both thy country and thyself.

Polyn. It may not be. How, known as coward once,
Could I again lead forth an armament ?

Antig. And why, dear boy, need'st thou be wroth
again ? 1420

What profit hast thou in thy country's fall ?

Polyn. Retreat is base ; and base that I, the elder,
Should thus be mocked and flouted by my brother.

Antig. And see'st thou then, how those his oracles
Thou ledest to fulfilment, that you both
Should meet your death, each from the other's hand ?

Polyn. His wish begets the thought. We may not
yield.

Antig. O wretched me ! and who will follow thee,
Hearing the evils which his lips predict ?

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Polyn. These idle threats we tell not. Wise in war
Is he who speaks the better, not the worse. 1430

Antig. And is thy mind, my brother, fixed and firm?

Polyn. Restrain me not. Sad counsel must I take,
For this my march, beforehand doomed to fail,
By him, my father, and the Erinnyes dread.
But you,—Zeus bless you, if to me in death
Ye grant the boon I asked for; for in life
Ye meet me not again. And now, release me.
Farewell! ye look upon my face no more.

Antig. Ah wretched me!

Polyn. Bemoan thou not for me!

Antig. And who could keep from wailing, brother
dear,

For thee, thus rushing on an open grave? 1440

Polyn. Well, I will die, if so I must.

Antig. Not so.

List thou to me.

Polyn. Persuade me not to wrong.

Antig. Ah, misery! to be bereaved of thee!

Polyn. These things depend on God, this way or that,
To be or not to be; but I for you
Will pray the Gods that ye may meet no harm,
Who, as all deem, no evil have deserved. [Exit.

[*The sky grows dark, thunder is heard in the
distance.*

STROPHE I

Chor. Freshly they come on me,
Fresh ills, and burdens grievous to be borne,
From this blind wanderer, unless, perchance,

His destiny comes on him: 1450

For what the Gods decree I cannot count
As done in vain. Time evermore looks on,
And sees these things, now overturning some,
And now, within a day, exalting them.

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

O Zeus, the high heaven thunders !

Œdip. My children, oh, that some one, present here,
Would call back Theseus, best and noblest, hither !

Antig. What is thy purpose, father, that thou call'st
him ?

Œdip. This wingèd thunder, sent from Zeus, will lead
me 1460

Straightway to Hades. Make good speed to send.

*[Peals of thunder are heard at intervals during
the remainder of the Choral Ode.]*

ANTISTROPHE I

Chor. So the loud thunder crashes,
Hurled forth from Zeus, with dread unspeakable,
And fear creeps up to every topmost hair.

I tremble in my soul :

For lo ! the fire from heaven has blazed again.
What will the end be ? Much I fear. In vain
It never comes, nor without issue dread. 1470

O mighty heaven ! O Zeus !

Œdip. My children ! now the destined end of life
Is come to him who stands here : flight is none.

Antig. How know'st thou this ? What token comes
to thee ?

Œdip. I know right well. But, oh, let some one fetch,
Losing no time, the ruler of the land !

STROPHE II

Chor. Ah ! ah ! again the crash
Rolls piercingly around.

Be pitiful, O God, be pitiful,
If thou bring'st darkness on our motherland ;
And may I find thee gracious evermore,
Nor, looking on a man accursèd, reap 1480

A boon that profits not.

King Zeus, I call on thee !

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Œdip. Is your chief near? And will he find me,
children,
Still living, still with wonted powers of mind?

Antig. What secret would'st thou to his soul confide?

Œdip. I would fain give the good I promised him,
Some poor return for all that I received. 1490

ANTISTROPHE II

Chor. Come, come, my son, come quick,
*Though on the valley's edge
*Thou consecrat'st the hearth for sacrifice
To Ocean's lord, Poseidon, come thou quick;
For lo! the stranger fain would give to thee,
Thy city, and thy friends, just meed of thanks
For kind acts done. Come, haste,
Haste onward, O my king.

Enter THESEUS.

Thes. What means this mingled din? For lo! full
plain, 1500
My subjects' voice, and clear the stranger's too.
Is it the thunderbolt of Zeus, or shower
Of hail bursts on you? When Heaven sends storm like
this,
All wild conjectures seem most probable.

Œdip. Thou com'st, O prince, to one who much
desires thee,
And 'tis a God that blest thy journey hither.

Thes. What new event, O son of Laios, moves thee?

Œdip. My life's scale turns i' the balance. I would
fain

In death be true to thee and to thy State.

Thes. What token that the end is near hast thou?

Œdip. The Gods themselves are heralds of my doom,
Failing in nought of all the appointed signs.

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Thes. What is 't, old friend, makes these things clear
to thee? 1510

Œdip. These many thunder-claps, that still roar on,
These many flashes from the unconquered Hand.

Thes. I trust thy word, for I perceive thy soul
Divineth many things, and none are false ;
And therefore tell me, what I needs must do.

Œdip. I will inform thee, son of Ægeus old,
Of things for thee and for thy city, free
From any touch of Time's consuming power :
And I myself, with none to guide my steps,
Will show the spot where I am doomed to die. 1520
And this, I charge thee, tell to none on earth ;
Nor where the grave, nor e'en the region, tell,
Whose fields enclose it. So shall he who speaks
Give greater strength to thee than many shields,
Or hireling force called in, 'gainst neighbouring lands ;
And for the mystic words which none may speak,
Thyself shalt learn them, going there alone,
For I to none of these may utter them,
Nor even to my children, though I love them.
And thou, I charge thee, hide them evermore ;¹ 1530
And when thy death-hour comes, to one alone,
Thine eldest born, disclose them : and, in turn,
Let each reveal to those that follow him.
And so thou shalt establish this thy land,
By dragon's brood unhurt.² A thousand states,
Though governed well, have lightly waxed o'er-proud ;
For, though the Gods see clearly, they are slow
In marking when a man, despising them,
Turns from their worship to the scorn of fools.

¹ The local tradition of Colonos apparently, while asserting that it was the resting-place of Œdipus, refrained from pointing out the precise position of his grave.

² "Dragon's brood"—*sc.* the Thebans, as descended from the men who sprang from the dragon's teeth sown by Cadmos.

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Far be such fate from thee, O Ægeus' son ;
 These things we teach thee, though thou knowest them.
 And now, for still the promptings of the God 1540
 Press on me strongly, let us seek the spot,
 Nor linger on in fear. My children, follow ;
 A new guide I for you, as ye have been
 To me your father. Come ye. Touch me not ;
 But let me find the hallowed grave myself,
 Where fate has fixed that he who speaks shall lay
 His bones to rest in this fair land we tread.
 Come hither,—hither,—this way. So He leads,
 Hermes the guide, and She who reigns below.¹
 O Light ! to me all dark, thou once wast mine,
 And now this body feels thy ray's last touch, 1550
 Now, and no more ; for now I grope my way,
 To hide the dwindling remnant of my life
 In Hades dark. And thou, of all friends dearest,
 Live happy, thou, thy country, and thy servants ;
 And in your great good fortune, think of me
 When I am gone, and ye are prosperous still.

*[Exit ŒDIPUS, followed, at some distance,
 by THESEUS, ANTIGONE, and ISMENE.]*

Chor. If rightly I may come with homage due
 To Her whom none may see,
 And thee, O King of those that dwell in night,
 Aidoneus, O Aidoneus ! 1560
 I supplicate thy aid ; O grant that he,
 The stranger, wend his way,
 With no long agony,
 No fate of many woes, to that dark land,
 The home of all the dead,
 Still wrapt in Stygian gloom.
 For so, though many woes unmerited
 Upon his life have come,

¹ Hermes in his special function as guiding the souls of the dead to Hades. "She who reigns below" is, of course, Persephone.

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

God, the All-just, shall raise him up again.

ANTISTROPHE

Ye Goddess Powers, who in the central dark¹
Dwell evermore, and thou,
Dread form of mightiest monster, who, they say,
Still find'st thy lair by gates
That turn on well-worn hinge continually, 1570
And from thy cavern growl'st,
Watchman of Hades dread ;
Bid him, thou Son of Earth and Tartaros,
Bid him, I pray, withdraw,
Leaving an open path,
For him who travels to the fields below,
There where the dead abide :
Thee, I invoke, the Lord of endless sleep!

Enter a Messenger.

Mess. To tell my tale, in fewest words, good sirs,
I need but say that Œdipus is dead ; 1580
But what has passed, the deeds that there were done,
My tale, in short discourse, would fail to tell.

Chor. Is he then dead, ill-starred one?

Mess. Think of him
As having closed his weary course of life.

Chor. How? Was it by God-given, painless death?

Mess. Yea, these are things we well may wonder at ;
For how he went from hence, thou knowest well,
(Thyself being present) no friend guiding him,
But he himself still led the way for all ;
And when he neared the threshold's broken slope, 1590
With steps of bronze fast rooted in the soil,

¹ The invocation passes from Persephone and Aidoneus (Pluto) to the Erinnyes, daughters of Darkness and Kerberos, and finally to Death himself, the "Son of Earth and Tartaros."

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

He stopped on one of paths that intersect,¹
Close to the hollow urn where still are kept
The pledges true of Perithos and Theseus;²
And stopping at mid distance between it,
And the Thorikian rock, and hollow pear,
And the stone sepulchre, he sat him down,
And then put off his garments travel-stained,
And then he called his girls, and bade them fetch
Clear water from the stream, and bring to him
For cleansing and libation. And they went,
Both of them, to yon hill we look upon,
Owned by Demêter of the fair green corn,
And quickly did his bidding, bathed his limbs,
And clothed him in the garment that is meet.
And when he had his will in all they did,
And not one wish continued unfulfilled,
Zeus from the dark depths thundered, and the girls
Heard it, and shuddering, at their father's knees
Falling they wept : nor did they then forbear
Smiting their breasts, nor groanings lengthened out ;
And when he heard their bitter cry, forthwith
Folding his arms around them, thus he spake :
" My children ! on this day ye cease to have
A father. All my days are spent and gone :
And ye no more shall lead your wretched life,
Caring for me. Hard was it, that I know,
My children ! yet one word is strong to loose,
Although alone, the burden of these toils,
For love in larger store ye could not have
From any than from him who standeth here,
Of whom bereaved ye now shall lead your life."

1600

1610

¹ The indefiniteness of the description agrees with that of the local tradition, 1523.

² The pledges which the true heroes had given each other when they bound themselves to go down to Hades were naturally kept near the spot from which they had descended. The Heroön dedicated to them stood at Colonos in the time of Pausanias, i. 18, 4.

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

So intertwined, all wept and sobbed : and when
They ended all their wailing, and the cry
No longer rose, there came a silence. Then
A voice from some one cried aloud to him,
And filled them all with fear, that made each hair
To stand on end. For, many a time, the God
From many a quarter calls to him. "Ho there!
Come, come, thou Œdipus, why stay we yet?
Long time thy footsteps linger on the way."
And he, when he perceived the God had called,
Bade Theseus come, the ruler of the land ;
And when he came, he said, "Ah, dearest friend,
Give me thy hand's old pledge to these my girls ;
And ye, give yours to him. And do thou swear,
Of thy free will never to give them up,
But ever to fulfil what thou shalt judge,
With clearest insight, best." And he, as one
Of noble nature, wept not, but did vow
With solemn oath to do his friend's behest.
And this being done, then straightway Œdipus
Clasping his children with his sightless hands,
Spake thus : "My children ! Now ye need to show
Your tempers true and noble, and withdraw
From where ye stand, nor think it right to look
On things that best are hidden, nor to list
To those that speak ; but ye, with utmost speed
Go forth. But Theseus, who may claim the right,
Let him remain, to learn the things that come."
So much we all together heard him speak,
And then, with tears fast flowing, groaning still
We followed with the maidens. Going on
A little space we turned. And lo ! we saw
The man no more ; but he, the king, was there,
Holding his hand to shade his eyes, as one
To whom there comes a vision drear and dread
He may not bear to look on. Yet awhile,

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

But little, and we see him bowed to earth,
Adoring it, and in the self-same prayer
Olympos, home of Gods. What form of death
He died, knows no man, but our Theseus only.
For neither was it thunderbolt from Zeus
With flashing fire that slew him, nor the blast
Of whirlwind sweeping o'er the sea that hour,
But either some one whom the Gods had sent,
To guide his steps, or else the abyss of earth
In friendly mood had opened wide its jaws
*Without one pang. And so the man was led
With nought to mourn for—did not leave the world
As worn with pain and sickness; but his end,
If any ever was, was wonderful.
And if I seem to any, saying this,
As one who dreams, I would not care to win
Their favour who as dreamer count of me.

1663

Chor. Where are his daughters, and the friends that
led them?

Mess. Not far are they. Their voices wailing loud
Give token clear that they are drawing nigh.

Enter ANTIGONE and ISMENE.

STROPHE

Antig. Ah me! 'tis ours to mourn,
All desolate and sad,
Not once or twice alone,
Our father's taint of blood,
For whom long time we bore our constant toil
In many a land, and now at last must tell,
Seeing and suffering both,
Woes strange and wonderful.

1670

Chor. What is it then?

Antig. That, friends, ye well may guess.

Chor. Has he then gone?

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Antig. As thou might'st wish to go :

How else? since he was one
Whom neither din of war 1680
Nor fell disease approached ;
Whom, with strange darkling fate
The land of shadows clasped,
So borne away from us ;
And lo! upon our eyes
There falls the night of death!
For how, on some far land
Wandering, or ocean wave,
Shall we now live our life intolerable?

Ism. I know not that indeed!
But oh! that Hades dark and murderous 1690
Would take me in my woe,
To die with him, my father, in his age!
Henceforth my life is more than I can live.

Chor. O children! noblest pair!
Ye ought to bear right well
That which bears God's intent.
Be not thus vexed in mood ;
The path ye trod is one ye should not blame.

ANTISTROPHE

Antig. Even o'er grief long borne
We lingered with regret,
And that which erst we loved not,
Became the thing we loved ;
So was it when I had him in my grasp.
My father, dearest one! 1700

O thou, who now art wrapt
In that eternal darkness of the grave!
For never shall thy name, though thou art dead,
To her and me be anything but dear!

Chor. And did he fare . . . ?

Antig. He fared as he desired.

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Chor. And how was that?

Antig. In strange land as he wished

He died, and sleeps beneath,

Where sweet, calm shadows brood for evermore ;

Nor did he die unwept ;

For still these eyes, my father, shed their tears, 1710

Nor know I, in my woe,

How to suppress my grief, my grief for thee.

*Ah me! thou did'st desire

*In this strange land to die ;

And yet thou thus hast died,

Alone, apart from me!

Ism. Ah me! ah misery!

What fate of loneliness,

What drear perplexity,

Awaits me now, and thee, O dearest one,

In this our orphaned lot ?

Chor. Yet, maidens, since his life 1720

With blessing now has closed ;

Cease from your wailing drear ;

No man escapes from woe.

Antig. Once more, dear sister, let us haste away.

Ism. With what intent ?

Antig. A strong desire comes o'er me.

Ism. What is 't ?

Antig. To see once more the holy ground.

Ism. Of whom ?

Antig. My father. Woe is me ! Ah, woe !

Ism. But how can this be right ? And seest thou
not . . . ?

Antig. What means this chiding ?

Ism. This too . . . ? 1730

Antig. This again ?

Ism. He died unburied, none were by his side.

Antig. Lead me, and slay me o'er him.

Ism. Woe is me !

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Where then shall I, abandoned and perplexed,
Drag on my weary life ?

Chor. Fear nothing, maidens dear !

Antig. Where escape ?

Chor. Yet one escape there was . . .

Antig. Of what speak'st thou ?

Chor. Of thine and hers, from chance of evil fate. ¹⁷⁴⁰

Antig. I think this o'er. . . .

Chor. O'er what then broodest thou ?

Antig. How to return to what was once our home
I find not.

Chor. Seek it not.

Antig. Yet woes oppress.

Chor. Long since they crushed thee.

Antig. Desperate then ; now worse.

Chor. A sea of troubles, then, has been your lot.

Antig. Yea, yea.

Chor. I own it too !

Antig. Ah me ! ah me !

Whither to turn, O Zeus ?

For still, e'en now, the God

Leads me to bodings strange.

1750

Enter THESEUS.

Thes. Cease from your weeping, maidens. Over those
For whom the night of death as blessing comes,
We may not mourn. Such grief the Gods chastise.

Antig. O son of Ægeus, at thy feet we fall.

Thes. What boon then seek ye, maidens ?

Antig. We would see
With our own eyes our father's sepulchre.

Thes. It may not be : ye may not thither go.

Antig. How say'st thou, prince, of Athens lord and
king ?

Thes. O maidens, he forbade that mortal foot
Should e'er draw nigh this spot, or mortal voice

1760

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Invoke in prayer the holy burial-place
Where now he lies. And, doing this, he said
That I should rule a land unvexed by ills ;
These things our God has heard, and that dread Power,
The Oath of Zeus, that ever heareth all.

Antig. This shall suffice, if this was what he willed.
But send thou us to Thebes of old renown, 1770
That so, if it may be, we stop the death
That comes upon our brothers.

Thes. This will I
Accomplish for you, and whate'er is best
For you, and dear to him who sleeps below,
So lately gone, I may not weary in.

Chor. Refrain ye then from weeping, cease to mourn.
All this is fixed, and nought of all shall fail. 1780

ANTIGONE¹

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

CREON, <i>King of Thebes.</i>	<i>Second Messenger</i>
HÆMON, <i>son of CREON.</i>	EURYDIKE, <i>wife of CREON.</i>
TEIRESIAS, <i>a seer.</i>	ANTIGONE, } <i>daughters of CÆDIPUS.</i>
<i>Guard.</i>	ISMENE, }
<i>First Messenger.</i>	<i>Chorus of Theban Elders.</i>

ARGUMENT.—After the death of Cædipus, Antigone and Ismene returned to Thebes, and lived in the king's house with Eteocles, their brother. But the seven great captains from Argos, whom Polyneikes had called to help him, came against Thebes to destroy it, and were hardly driven back. And the two brothers having died by each other's hands, the people of the city made Creon their king, as being wise and prudent, and next of kin to the dead; and he issued his decree that Eteocles should be buried with due honour, but that no man should dare to bury Polyneikes, who had come purposing to lay waste the city and all the temples of the Gods.

¹ The starting point of the *Antigone* was found in the closing scene of the *Seven against Thebes* of Æschylos. There the herald of the Council of Thebes proclaims the decree that Polyneikes is to be left unburied, and Antigone declares her resolve to bury him in spite of it. There, however, she is helped by the Chorus of her Maidens. Her lofty, solitary courage, in defiance of her sister's entreaties and Hæmon's love for her, sprang out of Sophocles' imagination.

Though placed here as the sequel to the two Cædipus tragedies, the *Antigone* was, in order of composition, in all probability, the earliest of the three. We find in them, accordingly, some references to it, but none in it to them; no passing hint even at the wonderful death of Cædipus at Colonos.

ANTIGONE

SCENE.—THEBES, *in front of the Palace. Early morning. Hills in the distance on the left; on the right the city.*

Enter ANTIGONE and ISMENE.

Antig. Ismene, mine own sister, darling one!
Is there, of ills that sprang from *Œdipus*,
One left that *Zeus* will fail to bring on us,
The two who yet remain? Nought is there sad,
*Nought full of sorrow, steeped in sin or shame,
But I have seen it in thy woes and mine.
And now, what new decree is this they tell,
Our captain has enjoined on all the State?
Know'st thou? Hast heard? Or are they hid from
thee,

The ills that come from foes upon our friends? 10

Ism. No tidings of our friends, *Antigone*,
Pleasant or painful, since that hour have come,
When we, two sisters, lost our brothers twain,
In one day dying by a twofold blow.
And since in this last night the *Argive* host
Has left the field, I nothing further know,
Nor brightening fortune, nor increasing gloom.

Antig. That knew I well, and therefore sent for thee
Beyond the gates, that thou may'st hear alone.

Ism. What meanest thou? It is but all too clear 20
Thou broodest darkly o'er some tale of woe.

Antig. And does not *Creon* treat our brothers twain
One with the rites of burial, one with shame?

ANTIGONE

Eteocles, so say they, he interred
 Fitly, with wonted rites, as one held meet
 To pass with honour to the dead below.
 But for the corpse of Polyneikes, slain
 So piteously, they say, he has proclaimed
 To all the citizens, that none should give
 His body burial, or bewail his fate,
 But leave it still unwept, unsepulchred,¹
 A prize full rich for birds that scent afar
 Their sweet repast. So Creon bids, they say,
 Creon the good, commanding thee and me,—
 Yes, me, I say,—and now is coming here,
 To make it clear to those who know it not,
 And counts the matter not a trivial thing ;
 But whoso does the things that he forbids,
 For him there waits within the city's walls
 The death of stoning. Thus, then, stands thy case ;
 And quickly thou wilt show, if thou art born
 Of noble nature, or degenerate liv'st,
 Base child of honoured parents.

Ism. How could I,

O daring in thy mood, in this our plight,
 Or breaking law or keeping, aught avail ?

Antig. Wilt thou with me share risk and toil ? Look
 to it.

Ism. What risk is this ? What purpose fills thy mind ?

Antig. Wilt thou help this my hand to lift the dead ?

Ism. Mean'st thou to bury him, when law forbids ?

Antig. He is my brother ; yes, and thine, though thou
 Would'st fain he were not. I desert him not.

Ism. O daring one, when Creon bids thee not ?

Antig. He has no right to keep me from mine own.

¹ The horror with which the Greek mind thought of this prevention of burial rites is seen in the prayer of Polyneikes (*Ed. Col.* 1410), and the dispute between Menelaos and Teucros as to the burial of Aias.

ANTIGONE

Ism. Ah me! remember, sister, how our sire
Perished, with hate o'erwhelmed and infamy, 80
From evils that himself did bring to light,¹
With his own hand himself of eyes bereaving,
And how his wife and mother, both in one,
With twisted cordage, cast away her life;
And thirdly, how our brothers in one day
In suicidal conflict wrought the doom,
Each of the other. And we twain are left;
And think, how much more wretchedly than all
We twain shall perish, if, against the law,
We brave our sovereign's edict and his power. 80
This first we need remember, we were born
Women; as such, not made to strive with men.
And next, that they who reign surpass in strength,
And we must bow to this, and worse than this.
I then, entreating those that dwell below,
To judge me leniently, as forced to yield,
Will hearken to our rulers. Over-zeal
That still will meddle, little wisdom shows.

Antig. I will not ask thee, nor though thou should'st
wish
To do it, should'st thou join with my consent. 70
Do what thou wilt, I go to bury him;
And good it were, in doing this, to die.
Loved I shall be with him whom I have loved,
Guilty of holiest crime. More time is mine
In which to share the favour of the dead,
Than that of those who live; for I shall rest
For ever there. But thou, if thus thou please,
Count as dishonoured what the Gods approve.

Ism. I do them no dishonour, but I find

¹ Here the impression left is, that the blindness was followed almost immediately by the death. The thought of the long discipline of suffering and tranquil death which we find in the *Œdipus at Colonus* belonged to a later period of the poet's life.

ANTIGONE

Myself too weak to war against the State.

Antig. Make what excuse thou wilt, I go to rear
A grave above the brother whom I love.

Ism. Ah, wretched me! how much I fear for thee!

Antig. Fear not for me. Thine own fate raise
safety. 80

Ism. At any rate, disclose this deed to none;
Keep it close hidden: I will hide it too.

Antig. Speak out! I bid thee. Silent, thou wilt be
More hateful to me, if thou fail to tell
My deed to all men.

Ism. Fiery is thy mood,
Although thy deeds the very blood might chill.

Antig. I know I please the souls I ought to please.

Ism. Yes, if thou canst; thou seek'st the impossible. ⁹⁰

Antig. When strength shall fail me, then I'll cease to
strive.

Ism. We should not hunt the impossible at all.

Antig. If thou speak thus, my ~~hated~~ wilt thou gain,
And rightly wilt be hated of the dead.
Leave me and my ill counsel to endure
This dreadful doom. I shall not suffer aught
So evil as a death dishonourable.

Ism. Go then, if so thou wilt. Of this be sure,
Wild as thou art, thy friends must love thee still.

[*Exeunt.*]

Enter Chorus of Theban Elders.

STROPHE I

Chor. O light of yon bright sun,¹ 100
Fairest of all that ever shone on Thebes,
Thebes with her seven high gates,
Thou didst appear that day,

¹ The action of the drama begins at daybreak, and this hymn is therefore sung to the sun at its rising.

ANTIGONE

Eye of the golden dawn,
O'er Dirké's streams advancing,
Driving with quickened curb,
In haste of headlong flight,
The warrior¹ who, in panoply of proof,
From Argos came, with shield of glittering white ; 110
Whom Polyneikes brought,
Roused by the strife of tongues
Against our fatherland,
As eagle shrieking shrill,
He hovered o'er our land,
With snow-white wing bedecked,
Begirt with myriad arms,
And flowing horsehair crests.

ANTISTROPHE I

He stood above our towers,
Encircling, with his spears all blood-bestained,
The portals of our gates ; 120
He went, before he filled
His jaw with blood of men,
Ere the pine-fed Hephæstos
Had seized our crown of towers
So loud the battle din
That Ares loves was raised around his ear,
A conflict hard e'en for his dragon foe.²
For breath of haughty speech
Zeus hateth evermore ;
And seeing them advance,
With mighty rushing stream,

¹ The "warrior" is used collectively for the whole Argive army under Adrastus that had come to invade Thebes and support the cause of Polyneikes.

² As the Argive army was compared to the eagle, so Thebes to the eagle's great enemy, the dragon. Here, probably, there was a half-latent reference to the *mythos* of the descent of the Thebans from the dragon's teeth sown by Cadmos.

ANTIGONE

And clang of golden arms,
With brandished fire he hurls
One who rushed eagerly
From topmost battlement
To shout out, "Victory!"

130

STROPHE II

Crashing to earth he fell,¹
Down-smitten, with his torch,
Who came, with madman's haste,
Drunken, with frenzied soul,
And swept o'er us with blasts,
The whirlwind blasts of hate.
Thus on one side they fare,
And Ares great, like war-horse in his strength,
Smiting now here, now there,
Brought each his several fate.
For seven chief warriors at the seven gates met,
Equals with equals matched,
To Zeus, the Lord of War,
Left tribute, arms of bronze ;
All but the hateful ones,
Who, from one father and one mother sprung,
Stood wielding, hand to hand,
Their two victorious spears,
And had their doom of death as common lot.

140

ANTISTROPHE II

But now, since Victory,
Of mightiest name, hath come
To Thebes, of chariots proud,
Joying and giving joy,
After these wars just past,

150

¹ The unnamed leader whose fall is thus singled out for special mention was Capaneus, who bore on his shield the figure of a naked man brandishing a torch and crying, "I will burn the city."

ANTIGONE

Learn ye forgetfulness,
And all night long, with dance and voice of hymns,
Let us go round in state
To all the shrines of Gods,
While Bacchos, making Thebes resound with dance,
Begins the strain of joy ;
But, lo ! our country's king,
Creon, Menceus' son,
New ruler, by new change,
And providence of God,
Comes to us, steering on some new device ;
For, lo ! he hath convened,
By herald's loud command,
This council of the elders of our land.

160

Enter CREON.

Creon. My friends, for what concerns our common-wealth,
The Gods who vexed it with the billowing storms
Have righted it again ; and I have sent,
By special summons, calling you to come
Apart from all the others. This, in part,
As knowing ye did all along uphold
The might of Laios' throne, in part again,
Because when Œdipus our country ruled,
And, when he perished, then towards his sons
Ye still were faithful in your steadfast mind.
And since they fell, as by a double death,
Both on the selfsame day with murderous blow,
Smiting and being smitten, now I hold
Their thrones and all their power of sov'reignty
By nearness of my kindred to the dead.
And hard it is to learn what each man is,
In heart and mind and judgment, till he gain
Experience in princedom and in laws.

170

ANTIGONE

For me, whoe'er is called to guide a State,
And does not catch at counsels wise and good,
But holds his peace through any fear of man,
I deem him basest of all men that are,
And so have deemed long since ; and whosoe'er
As worthier than his country counts his friend,
I utterly despise him. I myself,
Zeus be my witness, who beholdeth all,
Would not keep silence, seeing danger come,
Instead of safety, to my subjects true.
Nor could I take as friend my country's foe;
For this I know, that there our safety lies,
And sailing while the good ship holds her course,
We gather friends around us. By these rules
And such as these do I maintain the State.
And now I come, with edicts, close allied
To these in spirit, for my citizens,
Concerning those two sons of Œdipus.
Eteocles, who died in deeds of might
Illustrious, fighting for our fatherland,
To honour him with sepulture, all rites
Duly performed that to the noblest dead
Of right belong. Not so his brother ; him
I speak of, Polyneikes, who, returned
From exile, sought with fire to desolate
His father's city and the shrines of Gods,
Yes, sought to glut his rage with blood of men,
And lead them captives to the bondsman's doom ;
Him I decree that none shall dare entomb,
That none shall utter wail or loud lament,
But leave his corpse unburied, by the dogs
And vultures mangled, foul to look upon.
Such is my purpose. Ne'er, if I can help,
Shall the vile have more honour than the just ;
But whoso shows himself my country's friend,
Living or dead, from me shall honour gain.

180

190

200

ANTIGONE

Chor. This is thy pleasure, O Menœceus' son,
For him who hated, him who loved our State ;
And thou hast power to make what laws thou wilt,
Both for the dead and all of us who live.

Creon. Be ye then guardians of the things I speak.

Chor. Commit this task to one of younger years.

Creon. Nay, watchmen are appointed for the corpse.

Chor. What other task then dost thou lay on us ?

Creon. Not to consent with those that disobey.

Chor. None are so foolish as to seek for death. 220

Creon. Yet that shall be the doom ; but love of gain
Hath oft with false hopes lured men to their death.

Enter Guard.

Guard. I will not say, O king, that I have come
Panting with speed, and plying nimble feet,
For I had many halting-points of thought,
Backwards and forwards turning, round and round :
For now my mind would give me sage advice ;
“ Poor wretch, why go where thou must bear the blame ?
Or wilt thou tarry, fool ? Shall Creon know
These things from others ? How wilt thou 'scape
grief ? ” 230

Revolving thus, I came in haste, yet slow,
And thus a short way finds itself prolonged ;
But, last of all, to come to thee prevailed.
And though I tell of nought, yet I will speak ;
For this one hope I cling to, might and main,
That I shall suffer nought but destiny.

Creon. What is it then that causes such dismay ?

Guard. First, for mine own share in it, this I say,
The deed I did not, do not know who did,
Nor should I rightly come to ill for it. 240

Creon. Thou feel'st thy way and fencest up thy deed
All round and round. 'Twould seem thou hast some news.

ANTIGONE

Guard. Yea, news of fear engenders long delay.

Creon. Wilt thou not speak, and then depart in peace?

Guard. Well, speak I will. The corpse . . . Some
one has been

But now and buried it, a little dust

O'er the skin scattering, with the wonted rites.

Creon. What say'st thou? What man dared this deed
of guilt?

Guard. I know not. Neither was there stroke of axe,
Nor earth cast up by mattock. All the soil 250
Was dry and hard, no track of chariot wheel;
But he who did it went and left no sign.

And when the first day-watchman showed it us,

The sight caused wonder and sore grief to all;

For he had disappeared: no tomb indeed

Was over him, but dust all lightly strown,

As by some hand that shunned defiling guilt;

And no sign was there of wild beast or dog

Having come and torn him. Evil words arose

Among us, guard to guard imputing blame, 260

Which might have come to blows, and none was there

To check its course, for each to each appeared

The man whose hand had done it. Yet not one

Had it brought home, but each disclaimed all knowledge;

And we were ready in our hands to take

Bars of hot iron, and to walk through fire,

And call the Gods to witness none of us

Were privy to his schemes who planned the deed,

Nor his who wrought it. Then at last, when nought

Was gained by all our searching, some one speaks, 270

Who made us bend our gaze upon the ground

In fear and trembling; for we neither saw

How to oppose it, nor, accepting it,

How we might prosper in it. And his speech

Was this, that all our tale should go to thee,

Not hushed up anywise. This gained the day;

ANTIGONE

And me, ill-starred, the lot condemns to win
This precious prize. So here I come to thee
Against my will; and surely do I trow
Thou dost not wish to see me. Still 'tis true
That no man loves the messenger of ill.

Chor. For me, my prince, my mind some time has
thought

If this perchance has some divine intent.

Creon. Cease then, before thou fillest me with wrath,
Lest thou be found, though full of years, a fool. 280
For what thou say'st is most intolerable,
That for this corpse the providence of Gods
Has any care. What! have they buried him,
As to their patron paying honours high,
Who came to waste their columned shrines with fire,
To desecrate their offerings and their lands,
And all their wonted customs? Dost thou see
The Gods approving men of evil deeds?
It is not so; but men of rebel mood, 291
Lifting their head in secret long ago,
Still murmured thus against me. Never yet
Had they their neck beneath the yoke, content
To bear it with submission. They, I know,
Have bribed these men to let the deed be done.
No thing in use by man, for power of ill,
Can equal money. This lays cities low,
This drives men forth from quiet dwelling-place,
This warps and changes minds of worthiest stamp,
To turn to deeds of baseness, teaching men
All shifts of cunning, and to know the guilt 300
Of every impious deed. But they who, hired,
Have wrought this crime, have laboured to their cost,
Or soon or late to pay the penalty.
But if Zeus still claims any awe from me,
Know this, and with an oath I tell it thee,
Unless ye find the very man whose hand

ANTIGONE

Has wrought this burial, and before mine eyes
Present him captive, death shall not suffice,
Till first, hung up still living, ye shall show
The story of this outrage, that henceforth,
Knowing what gain is lawful, ye may grasp
At that, and learn it is not meet to love
Gain from all quarters. By base profit won
You will see more destroyed than prospering.

810

Guard. May I then speak ? Or shall I turn and go ?

Creon. See'st not e'en yet how vexing are thy words ?

Guard. Is it thine ears they trouble, or thy soul ?

Creon. Why dost thou gauge my trouble where it is ?

Guard. The doer grieves thy heart, but I thine ears.

Creon. Pshaw ! what a babbler, born to prate art
thou !

820

Guard. May be ; yet I this deed, at least, did not.

Creon. Yes, and for money ; selling e'en thy soul.

Guard. Ah me !

How dire it is, in thinking, false to think !

Creon. Prate about thinking : but unless ye show
To me the doers, ye shall say ere long

That scoundrel gains still work their punishment. [*Exit.*

Guard. God send we find him ! Should we find him
not,

As well may be, (for this must chance decide,)

You will not see me coming here again ;

For now, being safe beyond all hope of mine,

Beyond all thought, I owe the Gods much thanks.

830

[*Exit.*

STROPHE I

Chor. Many the forms of life,
Wondrous and strange to see,
But nought than man appears
More wondrous and more strange.
He, with the wintry gales,

ANTIGONE

O'er the white foaming sea,
'Mid wild waves surging round,
Wendeth his way across :
Earth, of all Gods, from ancient days the first,
Unworn and undecayed.
He, with his ploughs that travel o'er and o'er,
Furrowing with horse and mule,
Wears ever year by year.

340

ANTISTROPHE I

The thoughtless tribe of birds,
The beasts that roam the fields,
The brood in sea-depths born,
He takes them all in nets
Knotted in snaring mesh.
Man, wonderful in skill.
And by his subtle arts
He holds in sway the beasts
That roam the fields, or tread the mountain's height ;
And brings the binding yoke
Upon the neck of horse with shaggy mane,
Or bull on mountain crest,
Untameable in strength.

350

STROPHE II

And speech, and thought as swift as wind,
And tempered mood for higher life of states,
These he has learnt, and how to flee
Or the clear cold of frost unkind,
Or darts of storm and shower,
Man all-providing. Unprovided, he
Meeteth no chance the coming days may bring ;
Only from Hades, still
*He fails to find escape,
Though skill of art may teach him how to flee
From depths of fell disease incurable.

360

ANTIGONE

ANTISTROPHE II

So, gifted with a wondrous might,
Above all fancy's dreams, with skill to plan,
Now unto evil, now to good,
He turns. While holding fast the laws,
His country's sacred rights,
That rest upon the oath of Gods on high,
High in the State : an outlaw from the State,
When loving, in his pride,
The thing that is not good ;
Ne'er may he share my hearth, nor yet my thoughts,
Who worketh deeds of evil like to this.

270

Enter Guards, bringing in ANTIGONE.

As to this portent which the Gods have sent,
I stand in doubt. Can I, who know her, say
That this is not the maid Antigone ?
O wretched one of wretched father born,
Thou child of *Ædipus*,
What means this ? Surely 'tis not that they bring
Thee as a rebel 'gainst the king's decree,
And taken in the folly of thine act ?

280

Guard. Yes ! She it was by whom the deed was done.
We found her burying. Where is Creon, pray ?

Chor. Back from his palace comes he just in time.

Enter CREON.

Creon. What chance is this, with which my coming fits ?

Guard. Men, O my king, should pledge themselves to
nought ;

For cool reflection makes their purpose void.
I surely thought I should be slow to come here,
Cowed by thy threats, which then fell thick on me ;
But now persuaded by the sweet delight

290

ANTIGONE

Which comes unlooked for, and beyond our hopes,
I come, although I swore the contrary,
Bringing this maiden, whom in act we found
Decking the grave. No need for lots was now ;
The prize was mine, and not another man's.
And now, O king, take her, and as thou wilt,
Judge and convict her. I can claim a right
To wash my hands of all this troublous coil. 400

Creon. How and where was it that ye seized and
brought her ?

Guard. She was in act of burying. Thou knowest all.

Creon. Dost know and rightly speak the tale thou tell'st ?

Guard. I saw her burying that self-same corpse
Thou bad'st us not to bury. Speak I clear ?

Creon. How was she seen, and taken in the act ?

Guard. The matter passed as follows:—When we came,
With all those dreadful threats of thine upon us,
Sweeping away the dust which, lightly spread,
Covered the corpse, and laying stript and bare 410
The tainted carcase, on the hill we sat
To windward, shunning the infected air,
Each stirring up his fellow with strong words,
If any shirked his duty. This went on
Some time, until the glowing orb of day
Stood in mid heaven, and the scorching heat
Fell on us. Then a sudden whirlwind rose,
A scourge from heaven, raising squalls on earth,
And filled the plain, the leafage stripping bare
Of all the forest, and the air's vast space 420
Was thick and troubled, and we closed our eyes,
Until the plague the Gods had sent was past ;
And when it ceased, a weary time being gone,
The girl is seen, and with a bitter cry,
Shrill as a bird's, when it beholds its nest
All emptied of its infant brood, she wails ;
Thus she, when she beholds the corpse all stript,

ANTIGONE

Groaned loud with many moanings, and she called
 Fierce curses down on those who did the deed.
 And in her hand she brings some fine, dry dust,
 And from a vase of bronze, well wrought, upraised, 430
 She pours the three libations o'er the dead.¹
 And we, beholding, give her chase forthwith,
 And run her down, nought terrified at us.
 And then we charged her with the former deed,
 As well as this. And nothing she denied.
 But this to me both bitter is and sweet,
 For to escape one's-self from ill is sweet,
 But to bring friends to trouble, this is hard
 And painful. Yet my nature bids me count
 Above all these things safety for myself. 440

Creon. [*To ANTIGONE.*] Thou, then—yes, thou, who
 bend'st thy face to earth—

Confessest thou, or dost deny the deed?

Antig. I own I did it, and will not deny.

Creon. [*To Guard.*] Go thou thy way, where'er thy
 will may choose,

Freed from a weighty charge. [*Exit Guard.*

[*To ANTIGONE.*] And now for thee.

Say in few words, not lengthening out thy speech,
 Knew'st thou the edicts which forbade these things?

Antig. I knew them. Could I fail? Full clear were
 they.

Creon. And thou did'st dare to disobey these laws?

Antig. Yes, for it was not Zeus who gave them
 forth, 450

* Nor Justice, dwelling with the Gods below,
 Who traced these laws for all the sons of men;
 Nor did I deem thy edicts strong enough,
 That thou, a mortal man, should'st over-pass

¹ The three libations were sometimes separately of wine, milk, and honey. Here the narrative implies that Antigone had but one urn, but adhered to the sacred number in her act of pouring.

ANTIGONE

The unwritten laws of God that know not change.
They are not of to-day nor yesterday,
But live for ever, nor can man assign
When first they sprang to being. Not through fear
Of any man's resolve was I prepared
Before the Gods to bear the penalty
Of sinning against these. That I should die
I knew, (how should I not?) though thy decree 460
Had never spoken. And, before my time
If I shall die, I reckon this a gain;
For whoso lives, as I, in many woes,
How can it be but he shall gain by death?
And so for me to bear this doom of thine
Has nothing painful. But, if I had left
My mother's son unburied on his death,
In that I should have suffered; but in this
I suffer not. And should I seem to thee
To do a foolish deed, 'tis simply this,—
I bear the charge of folly from a fool. 470

Chor. The maiden's stubborn will, of stubborn sire
The offspring shows itself. She knows not yet
To yield to evils.

Creon. Know then, minds too stiff
Most often stumble, and the rigid steel
Baked in the furnace, made exceeding hard,
Thou see'st most often split and shivered lie;
And I have known the steeds of fiery mood
With a small curb subdued. It is not meet
That one who lives in bondage to his neighbours
Should think too proudly. Wanton outrage then 480
This girl first learnt, transgressing these my laws;
But this, when she has done it, is again
A second outrage, over it to boast,
And laugh as having done it. Surely, then,
She is the man, not I, if, all unscathed,
Such deeds of might are hers. But be she child

ANTIGONE

Of mine own sister, or of one more near
Than all the kith and kin of Household Zeus,
She and her sister shall not 'scape a doom
Most foul and shameful ; for I charge her, too,
With having planned this deed of sepulture. 490
Go ye and call her. 'Twas but now within
I saw her raving, losing self-command.
And still the mind of those who in the dark
Plan deeds of evil is the first to fail,
And so convicts itself of secret guilt.
But most I hate when one found out in guilt
Will seek to gloze and brave it to the end.

Antig. And dost thou seek aught else beyond my
death ?

Creon. Nought else for me. That gaining, I gain all.

Antig. Why then delay ? Of all thy words not one
Pleases me now, (and may it never please !)
And so all mine must grate upon thine ears. 500
And yet how could I higher glory gain
Than placing my true brother in his tomb ?
There is not one of these but would confess
It pleases them, did fear not seal their lips.
The tyrant's might in much besides excels,
And it may do and say whate'er it will.

Creon. Of all the race of Cadmos thou alone
Look'st thus upon the deed.

Antig. They see it too
As I do, but their tongue is tied for thee.

Creon. Art not ashamed against their thoughts to
think ? 510

Antig. There is nought base in honouring our own
blood.

Creon. And was he not thy kin who fought against
him ?

Antig. Yea, brother, of one father and one mother.

Creon. Why then give honour which dishonours him ?

ANTIGONE

Antig. The dead below will not repeat thy words.

Creon. Yes, if thou give like honour to the godless.

Antig. It was his brother, not his slave that died.

Creon. Wasting this land, while *he* died fighting for it.

Antig. Yet Hades still craves equal rites for all.

Creon. The good craves not the portion of the bad. 530

Antig. Who knows if this be holy deemed below ?

Creon. Not even when he dies can foe be friend.

Antig. My nature leads to sharing love, not hate.

Creon. Go then below ; and if thou must have love,
Love them. While I live, women shall not rule.

Enter ISMENE, led in by Attendants.

Chor. And, lo ! Ismene at the gate
Comes shedding tears of sisterly regard,
And o'er her brow a gathering cloud

Mars the deep roseate blush,

Bedewing her fair cheek. 530

Creon. [*To ISMENE.*] And thou who, creeping as a
viper creeps,

Did'st drain my life in secret, and I knew not
That I was rearing two accursèd ones,
Subverters of my throne,—come, tell me, then,
Wilt thou confess thou took'st thy part in this,
Or wilt thou swear thou did'st not know of it ?

* *Ism.* I did the deed, if she did, go with her,
Yes, share the guilt, and bear an equal blame.

Antig. Nay, justice will not suffer this, for thou
Did'st not consent, nor did I let thee join.

Ism. Nay, in thy troubles, I am not ashamed
In the same boat with thee to share thy fate. 540

Antig. Who did it, Hades knows, and those below :
I do not love a friend who loves in words.

Ism. Do not, my sister, put me to such shame,
As not to let me join in death with thee,

ANTIGONE

And so to pay due reverence to the dead.

Antig. Share not my death, nor make thine own this deed

Thou had'st no hand in. My death shall suffice.

Ism. What life to me is sweet, bereaved of thee?

Antig. Ask Creon there, since thou o'er him dost watch.

Ism. Why vex me so, in nothing bettered by it? 550

Antig. 'Tis pain indeed, to laugh my laugh at thee.

Ism. But now, at least, how may I profit thee?

Antig. Save thou thyself. I grudge not thy escape.

Ism. Ah, woe is me! and must I miss thy fate?

Antig. Thou mad'st thy choice to live, and I to die.

Ism. 'Twas not because I failed to speak my thoughts.

Antig. To these did'st thou, to those did I seem wise.

Ism. And yet the offence is equal in us both.

Antig. Take courage. Thou dost live. My soul long since

Hath died to render service to the dead. 560

Creon. Of these two girls, the one goes mad but now, The other ever since her life began.

Ism. E'en so, O king; no mind that ever lived Stands firm in evil days, but goes astray.

Creon. Thine did, when, with the vile, vile deeds thou choosest.

Ism. How could I live without her presence here?

Creon. Speak not of presence. She is here no more.

Ism. And wilt thou slay thy son's betrothèd bride?

Creon. Full many a field there is which he may plough. 570

Ism. None like that plighted troth 'twixt him and her.

Creon. Wives that are vile I love not for my sons.

Ism. Ah, dearest Hæmon, how thy father shames thee!

Creon. Thou with that marriage dost but vex my soul.

Chor. And wilt thou rob thy son of her he loved?

Creon. 'Tis Death, not I, shall break the marriage off.

ANTIGONE

Chor. Her doom is fixed, it seems, then. She must die.

Creon. Fixed, yes, by me and thee. No more delay,
Lead them within, ye slaves. These must be kept
Henceforth as women, suffered not to roam ;
For even boldest natures shrink in fear
When they see Hades overshadowing life.

580

[*Exeunt Guards with ANTIGONE and ISMENE.*]

STROPHE I

Chor. Blessed are those whose life no woe doth taste !
For unto those whose house
The Gods have shaken, nothing fails of curse
Or woe, that creeps to generations far.
E'en thus a wave, (when spreads,
With blasts from Thrakian coasts,
The darkness of the deep,)
Up from the sea's abyss
Hither and thither rolls the black sand on,
And every jutting peak,
Swept by the storm-wind's strength,
Lashed by the fierce wild waves,
Re-echoes with the far-resounding roar.

590

ANTISTROPHE I

I see the woes that smote, in ancient days,
*The seed of Labdacos,
*Who perished long ago, with grief on grief
Still falling, nor does this age rescue that ;
Some God still smites it down,
Nor have they any end :
For now there rose a gleam,
Over the last weak shoots,
That sprang from out the race of *Ædipus* ;
Yet this the blood-stained scythe
Of those that reign below

600

ANTIGONE

Cuts off relentlessly,
And maddened speech, and frenzied rage of heart.

STROPHE II

Thy power, O Zeus, what haughtiness of man,
Yea, what can hold in check ?
Which neither sleep, that maketh all things old,
Nor the long months of Gods that never fail,
Can for a moment seize.
But still as Lord supreme,
Waxing not old with time,
Thou dwellest in Thy sheen of radiancy
On far Olympos' height. 610
Through future near or far as through the past,
One law holds ever good,
Nought comes to life of man unscathed throughout by
woe.

ANTISTROPHE II

For hope to many comes in wanderings wild,
A solace and support ;
To many as a cheat of fond desires,
And creepeth still on him who knows it not,
Until he burn his foot
Within the scorching flame. 620
Full well spake one of old,
That evil ever seems to be as good
To those whose thoughts of heart
God leadeth unto woe,
And without woe, he spends but shortest space of time.

And here comes Hæmon, last of all thy sons :
Comes he bewailing sore
The fate of her who should have been his bride,
The maid Antigone,
Grieving o'er vanished joys ? 630

ANTIGONE

Enter HÆMON.

Creon. Soon we shall know much more than seers can

Surely thou dost not come, my son, to rage
Against thy father, hearing his decree,
Fixing her doom who should have been thy bride ;
Or dost thou love us still, whate'er we do ?

Hæmon. My father, I am thine ; and thou dost guide
With thy wise counsels, which I gladly follow.
No marriage weighs one moment in the scales
With me, while thou dost guide my steps aright.

Creon. This thought, my son, should dwell within
thy breast,

That all things stand below a father's will ; 840
For so men pray that they may rear and keep
Obedient offspring by their hearths and homes,
That they may both requite their father's foes,
And pay with him like honours to his friend.

But he who reareth sons that profit not,
What could one say of him but this, that he
Breeds his own sorrow, laughter to his foes ?
*Lose not thy reason, then, my son, o'ercome
By pleasure, for a woman's sake, but know,
A cold embrace is that to have at home 850
A worthless wife, the partner of thy bed.

What ulcerous sore is worse than one we love
Who proves all worthless ? No ! with loathing scorn,
As hateful to thee, let that girl go wed
A spouse in Hades. Taken in the act
I found her, her alone of all the State,
Rebellious. And I will not make myself
False to the State. She dies. So let her call
On Zeus, the lord of kindred. If I rear
Of mine own stock things foul and orderless,
I shall have work enough with those without. 860

ANTIGONE

For he who in the life of home is good
Will still be seen as just in things of state ;
I should be sure that man would govern well,
And know well to be governed, and would stand
In war's wild storm, on his appointed post,
A just and good defender. But the man
Who by transgressions violates the laws,
Or thinks to bid the powers that be obey,
He must not hope to gather praise from me.
No! we must follow whom the State appoints
In things or just and trivial, or, may be,
The opposite of these. For anarchy
Is our worst evil, brings our commonwealth
To utter ruin, lays whole houses low,
In battle strife hurls firm allies in flight ;
But they who yield to guidance,—these shall find
Obedience saves most men. Thus help should come
To what our rulers order ; least of all
Ought men to bow before a woman's sway.
Far better, if it must be so, to fall
By a man's hand, than thus to bear reproach,
By woman conquered.

Chor.

Unto us, O king,
Unless our years have robbed us of our wit,
Thou seemest to say wisely what thou say'st.

Hæm. The Gods, my father, have bestowed on man
His reason, noblest of all earthly gifts ;
And that thou speakest wrongly these thy words
I cannot say, (God grant I ne'er know how
Such things to utter!) yet another's thoughts
May have some reason. 'Tis my lot to watch
What each man says or does, or blames in thee,
For dread thy face to one of low estate,
Who speaks what thou wilt not rejoice to hear.
But I can hear the things in darkness said,
How the whole city wails this maiden's fate,

ANTIGONE

As one "who of all women most unjustly,
For noblest deed must die the foulest death,
Who her own brother, fallen in the fray,
Would neither leave unburied, nor expose
To carrion dogs, or any bird of prey,
May she not claim the meed of golden praise?"
Such is the whisper that in secret runs 700
All darkling. And for me, my father, nought
Is dearer than thy welfare. What can be
A nobler prize of honour for the son
Than a sire's glory, or for sire than son's?
I pray thee, then, wear not one mood alone,
That what thou say'st is right, and nought but that;
For he who thinks that he alone is wise,
His mind and speech above what others have,
Such men when searched are mostly empty found.
But for a man to learn, though he be wise, 710
Yea to learn much, and know the time to yield,
Brings no disgrace. When winter floods the streams,
Thou see'st the trees that bend before the storm,
Save their last twigs, while those that will not yield
Perish with root and branch. And when one hauls
Too tight the mainsail rope, and will not slack,
He has to end his voyage with deck o'erturned.
Do thou then yield; permit thyself to change.
Young though I be, if any prudent thought
Be with me, I at least will dare assert 720
The higher worth of one, who, come what will,
Is full of knowledge. If that may not be,
(For nature is not wont to take that bent),
'Tis good to learn from those who counsel well.

Chor. My king! 'tis fit that thou should'st learn from
him,
If he speaks words in season; and, in turn,
That thou (*To HÆMON*) should'st learn of him, for both
speak well.

ANTIGONE

Creon. Shall we at our age stoop to learn from him,
Young as he is, the lesson to be wise?

Hæm. Learn nought thou should'st not learn. And
if I 'm young,
Thou should'st my deeds and not my years consider.

Creon. Is that thy deed to reverence rebel souls? 730

Hæm. I would bid none waste reverence on the base.

Creon. Has not that girl been seized with that disease?

Hæm. The men of Thebes with one accord say, No.

Creon. And will my subjects tell us how to rule?

Hæm. Dost thou not see thou speakest like a boy?

**Creon.* Must I then rule for others than myself?

Hæm. That is no State which hangs on one man's will.

Creon. Is not the State deemed his who governs it?

Hæm. Brave rule! Alone, and o'er an empty land!

Creon. This boy, it seems, will be his bride's ally. 740

Hæm. If thou art she, for thou art all my care.

Creon. Basest of base, against thy father pleading!

Hæm. Yea, for I see thee sin a grievous sin.

Creon. And do I sin revering mine own sway?

Hæm. Thou show'st no reverence, trampling on God's
laws.

Creon. O guilty soul, by woman's craft beguiled!

Hæm. Thou wilt not find me slave unto the base.

Creon. Thy every word is still on her behalf.

Hæm. Yea, and on thine and mine, and Theirs
below.

Creon. Be sure thou shalt not wed her while she
lives. 750

Hæm. Then she must die, and, dying, others slay.

Creon. And dost thou dare to come to me with
threats?

Hæm. Is it a threat against vain thoughts to speak?

Creon. Thou to thy cost shalt teach me wisdom's ways,
Thyself in wisdom wanting.

Hæm. I would say

ANTIGONE

Thou wast unwise, if thou wert not my father.

Creon. Thou woman's slave, I say, prate on no more.

Hæm. Wilt thou then speak, and, speaking, listen not ?

Creon. Nay, by Olympus ! Thou shalt not go free
To flout me with reproaches. Lead her out
Whom my soul hates, that she may die forthwith 760
Before mine eyes, and near her bridegroom here.

Hæm. No ! Think it not ! Near me she shall not
die,

And thou shalt never see my face alive,
That thou may'st storm at those who like to yield.

[*Exit.*

Chor. The man has gone, O king, in hasty mood.
A mind distressed in youth is hard to bear.

Creon. Let him do what he will, and bear himself
As more than man, he shall not save those girls.

Chor. What ! Dost thou mean to slay them both
alike ? 770

Creon. Not her who touched it not ; there thou
say'st well.

Chor. What form of death mean'st thou to slay her
with ?

Creon. Leading her on to where the desert path
Is loneliest, there alive, in rocky cave
Will I immure her, just so much of food
Before her set as may avert pollution,¹
And save the city from the guilt of blood ;
And there, invoking Hades, whom alone
Of all the Gods she worships, she, perchance,
Shall gain escape from death, or then shall know [780
That Hades-worship is but labour lost. [*Exit.*

¹ Creon's words point to the popular feeling that if some food, however little, were given to those thus buried alive, the guilt of starving them to death was averted. The same rule was observed at Rome in the punishment of the Vestal Virgins.

ANTIGONE

STROPHE

Chor. O Love, in every battle victor owned ;
*Love, rushing on thy prey,
Now on a maiden's soft and blooming cheek,
In secret ambush hid ;
Now o'er the broad sea wandering at will,
And now in shepherd's folds ;
Of all the Undying Ones none 'scape from thee,
Nor yet of mortal men
Whose lives are measured as a fleeting day ;
And who has thee is frenzied in his soul.

790

ANTISTROPHE

Thou makest vile the purpose of the just,
To his own fatal harm ;
Thou hast stirred up this fierce and deadly strife,
Of men of nearest kin ;
The charm of eyes of bride beloved and fair
Is crowned with victory,
And dwells on high among the powers that rule,
Equal with holiest laws ;
For Aphrodite, she whom none subdues,
Sports in her might and majesty divine,

800

I, even I, am borne
Beyond the appointed laws ;
I look on this, and cannot stay
The fountain of my tears.
For, lo ! I see her, see Antigone
Wend her sad, lonely way
To that bride-chamber where we all must lie.
Antig. Behold, O men of this my fatherland,
I wend my last lone way,
Seeing the last sunbeam, now and nevermore ;
He leads me yet alive,

810

ANTIGONE

Hades that welcomes all,
To Acheron's dark shore,
With neither part nor lot
In marriage festival,
Nor hath the marriage hymn
Been sung for me as bride,

But I shall be the bride of Acheron.

Chor. And hast thou not all honour, worthiest praise,
Who goest to the home that hides the dead,
Not smitten by the sickness that decays,
Nor by the sharp sword's meed, 820
But of thine own free will, in fullest life,
Alone of mortals, thus
To Hades tak'st thy way ?

Antig. I heard of old her pitiable end,¹
On Sipylos' high crag,
The Phrygian stranger from a far land come,
Whom Tantalos begat ;
Whom growth of rugged rock,
Clinging as ivy clings,
Subdued, and made its own :
And now, so runs the tale,
There, as she melts in shower,
The snow abideth aye, 830

And still bedews yon cliffs that lie below
Those brows that ever weep.

With fate like hers God brings me to my rest.

Chor. A Goddess she, and of the high Gods born ;²
And we are mortals, born of mortal seed.

*And lo ! for one who liveth but to die,

¹ The thoughts of Antigone go back to the story of one of her own race, whose fate was in some measure like her own. Niobe, daughter of Tantalos, became the wife of Amphion, and then, boasting of her children as more and more goodly than those of Leto, provoked the wrath of Apollo and Artemis, who slew her children. She, going to Sipylos, in Phrygia, was there turned into a rock.

² Tantalos, the father of Niobe, was himself a son of Zeus,

ANTIGONE

*To gain like doom with those of heavenly race,
Is great and strange to hear.

Antig. Ye mock me then. Alas! Why wait ye not,
By all our fathers' Gods, I ask of you,

Till I have passed away,

840

But flout me while I live?

O city that I love,

O men that claim as yours

That city stored with wealth,

O Dirke, fairest fount,

O grove of Thebes, that boasts her chariot host,

I bid you witness all,

How, with no friends to weep,

By what stern laws condemned,

I go to that strong dungeon of the tomb,

For burial strange, ah me!

850

Nor dwelling with the living, nor the dead.

Chor. Forward and forward still to farthest verge

Of daring hast thou gone,

And now, O child, thou hast rushed violently

Where Right erects her throne;

Surely thou payest to the uttermost

Thy father's debt of guilt.

Antig. Ah! thou hast touched the quick of all my
grief,

The thrice-told tale of all my father's woe,

860

The fate which dogs us all,

The old Labdakid race of ancient fame.

Woe for the curses dire

Of that defiled bed,

With foulest incest stained,

My mother's with my sire,

Whence I myself have sprung, most miserable.

And now, I go to them,

To sojourn in the grave,

Accursèd, and unwed;

ANTIGONE

Ah, brother, thou did'st find
Thy marriage fraught with ill,
And thou, though dead, hast smitten down my life.

876

Chor. Acts reverent and devout
May claim devotion's name,
But power, in one to whom power comes as trust,
May never be defied;
And thee, thy stubborn mood,
Self-chosen, layeth low.

Antig. Unwept, without a friend,
Unwed, and whelmed in woe,
I journey on this road that open lies.
No more shall it be mine (O misery!)
To look upon yon daylight's holy eye;
And yet, of all my friends,
Not one bewails my fate,
No kindly tear is shed.

880

Enter CREON.

Creon. And know ye not, if men have leave to speak
Their songs and wailings thus to stave off death,
That they will never stop? Lead, lead her on,
Without delay, and, as I said, immure
In yon cavernous tomb, and then depart.
Leave her to choose, or drear and lonely death,
Or, living, in the tomb to find her home.
Our hands are clean in all that touches her;
But she no more shall dwell on earth with us.

890

Antig. [*Turning towards the cavern.*] O tomb, my
bridal chamber, vaulted home.
Guarded right well for ever, where I go
To join mine own, of whom the greater part
Among the dead doth Persephassa hold;
And I, of all the last and saddest, wend
My way below, life's little span unfilled.

ANTIGONE

And yet I go, and feed myself with hopes
That I shall meet them, by my father loved,
Dear to my mother, well-beloved of thee,
Thou darling brother: I, with these my hands,
Washed each dear corpse, arrayed you, poured liba-
tions,

In rites of burial; and in care for thee,
Thy body, Polyneikes, honouring,
I gain this recompense. [And yet in sight
Of all that rightly judge the deed was good;
I had not done it had I come to be
A mother with her children,—had not dared,
Though 'twere a husband dead that mouldered there,
Against my country's will to bear this toil.
And am I asked what law constrained me thus?

I answer, had I lost a husband dear,
I might have had another; other sons
By other spouse, if one were lost to me;
But when my father and my mother sleep
In Hades, then no brother more can come.
And therefore, giving thee the foremost place,
I seemed in Creon's eyes, O brother dear,
To sin in boldest daring. Therefore now
He leads me, having taken me by force,
Cut off from marriage bed and marriage song,
Untasting wife's true joy, or mother's bliss,
With infant at her breast, but all forlorn,
Bereaved of friends, in utter misery,
Alive, I tread the chambers of the dead.]

What law of Heaven have I transgressed against?
What use for me, ill-starred one, still to look
To any God for succour, or to call
On any friend for aid? For holiest deed
I bear this charge of rank unholiness.
If acts like these the Gods on high approve,
We, taught by pain, shall own that we have sinned;

ANTIGONE

But if these sin, [*Looking at CREON,*] I pray they suffer
not

Worse evils than the wrongs they do to me. X

Chor. Still do the same wild blasts

Vex her who standeth there. 939

Creon. Therefore shall these her guards

Weep sore for this delay.

Chor. Ah me! this word of thine

Tells of death drawing nigh.

Creon. I cannot bid thee hope

For other end than this.

Antig. O citadel of Thebes, my native land,

Ye Gods of ancient days,

I go, and linger not.

Behold me, O ye senators of Thebes, 940

The last, lone scion of the kingly race,

What things I suffer, and from whom they come,

Revering still the laws of reverence.

[*Guards lead ANTIGONE away.*]

STROPHE I

Chor. So did the form of Danae bear of old,¹

In brazen palace hid,

To lose the light of heaven,

And in her tomb-like chamber was enclosed :

Yet she, O child, was noble in her race,

And well she stored the golden shower of Zeus. 950

But great and dread the might of Destiny ;

Nor kingly wealth, nor war,

Nor tower, nor dark-hulled ships

Beaten by waves, escape.

¹ As Antigone had gone back to the parallelisms of the past, so does the Chorus, finding in the first, at least, of the three examples that follow some topic of consolation. Danae, though shut up by her father Acrisios, received the golden shower of Zeus, and became the mother of the hero Perseus.

ANTIGONE

ANTISTROPHE

So too was shut, enclosed in dungeon cave,
Bitter and fierce in mood,
The son of Dryas,¹ king
Of yon Edonian tribes, for vile reproach,
By Dionysos' hands, and so his strength
And soul o'er mad wastes drop by drop away,
And so he learnt that he, against the God,
Spake his mad words of scorn;
For he the Mænad throng
And bright fire fain had stopped,
And roused the Muses' wrath.

080

STROPHE II

And by the double sea' of those Dark Rocks
Are shores of Bosporos,
And 'Thrakian isle, as Salmydessos known,
Where Ares, whom they serve,
God of the region round,
Saw the dire, blinding wound,
That smote the twin-born sons
Of Phineus by relentless step-dame's hand,—
*Dark wound, on dark-doomed eyes,

070

¹ The son of Dryas was Lycurgos, who appears in the *Iliad*, vi. 130, as having, like Pentheus, opposed the worship of Dionysos, and so fallen under the wrath of Zeus, who deprived him of sight, and entombed him in a cavern. The Muses are here mentioned as the companions and nurses of Dionysos.

² The last instance was taken from the early legends of Attica. Boreas, it was said, carried off Oreithyia, daughter of Erechtheus, and by her had two sons and a daughter, Cleopatra. The latter became the wife of Phineus, king of Salmydessos, and bore two sons to him, Plexippos and Pandion. Phineus then divorced her, married another wife, Idæa, and then, at her instigation, deprived his two sons by the former marriage of their sight, and confined Cleopatra in a dungeon. She too, like Danae and Niobe, was "a child of Gods," and the Erechtheion on the Acropolis was consecrated to the joint worship of her grandfather and of Poseidon

ANTIGONE

*Not with the stroke of sword,
But blood-stained hands, and point of spindle sharp.

ANTISTROPHE II

And they in misery, miserable fate,
Wasting away, wept sore,
Born of a mother wedded with a curse, 980
And she who claimed descent
From men of ancient fame,
The old Erechtheid race,
Amid her father's winds,
Daughter of Boreas, in far distant caves
Was reared, a child of Gods,
Swift moving as the steed
O'er lofty crag, and yet
The ever-living Fates bore hard on her.

Enter TEIRESIAS, guided by a Boy.

Teir. Princes of Thebes, we come as travellers joined,
One seeing for both, for still the blind must use
A guide's assistance to direct his steps. 990

Creon. And what new thing, Teiresias, brings thee
here ?

Teir. I'll tell thee, and do thou the seer obey.

Creon. Of old I was not wont to slight thy thoughts.

Teir. So did'st thou steer our city's course full well.

Creon. I bear my witness from good profit gained.

Teir. Know, then, thou walk'st on fortune's razor-edge.

Creon. What means this ? How I shudder at thy
speech !

Teir. Soon shalt thou know, as thou dost hear the
signs

Of my dread art. For sitting, as of old,
Upon my ancient seat of augury, 1000
Where every bird finds haven, lo ! I hear

ANTIGONE

Strange cry of winged creatures, shouting shrill,
With inarticulate passion, and I knew
That they were tearing each the other's flesh
With bloody talons, for their whirring wings
Made that quite clear : and straightway I, in fear,
Made trial of the sacrifice that lay
On fiery altar. And Hephæstos' flame
Shone not from out the offering ; but there oozed
Upon the ashes, trickling from the bones,
A moisture, and it smouldered, and it spat,
And, lo ! the gall was scattered to the air, 1010
And forth from out the fat that wrapped them round
The thigh-bones fell. Such omens of decay
From holy sacrifice I learnt from him,
This boy, who now stands here, for he is still
A guide to me, as I to others am.
And all this evil falls upon the State,
From out thy counsels ; for our altars all,
Our sacred hearths are full of food for dogs
And birds unclean, the flesh of that poor wretch
Who fell, the son of Œdipus. And so
The Gods no more hear prayers of sacrifice,
Nor own the flame that burns the victim's limbs ; 1020
Nor do the birds give cry of omen good,
But feed on carrion of a slaughtered corpse.
Think thou on this, my son : to err, indeed,
Is common unto all, but having erred,
He is no longer reckless or unblest,
Who, having fallen into evil, seeks
For healing, nor continues still unmoved.
Self-will must bear the charge of stubbornness :
Yield to the dead, and outrage not a corpse.
What prowess is it fallen foes to slay ? 1030
Good counsel give I, planning good for thee,
And of all joys the sweetest is to learn
From one who speaketh well, should that bring gain.

ANTIGONE

Creon. Old man, as archers aiming at their mark,
 So ye shoot forth your venom'd darts at me ;
 I know your augur's tricks, and by your tribe
 Long since am tricked and sold. Yes, gain your gains,
 Get Sardis' amber metal, Indian gold ;¹
 That corpse ye shall not hide in any tomb.
 Not though the eagles, birds of Zeus, should bear 1040
 Their carrion morsels to the throne of God,
 Not even fearing this pollution dire,
 Will I consent to burial. Well I know
 That man is powerless to pollute the Gods.
 But many fall, Teiresias, dotard old,
 A shameful fall, who gloze their shameful words
 For lucre's sake, with surface show of good.

Teir. Ah me ! Does no man know, does none con-
 sider . . . ?

Creon. Consider what ? What trite poor saw comes
 now ?

Teir. How far good counsel is of all things best ? 1050

Creon. So far, I trow, as folly is worst ill.

Teir. Of that disease thy soul, alas ! is full.

Creon. I will not meet a seer with evil words.

Teir. Thou dost so, saying I divine with lies.

Creon. The race of seers is ever fond of gold.

Teir. And that of tyrants still loves lucre foul.

Creon. Dost know thou speak'st thy words of those
 that rule ?

Teir. I know. Through me thou rul'st a city saved.

Creon. Wise seer art thou, yet given o'ermuch to
 wrong.

Teir. Thou 'lt stir me to speak out my soul's dread
 secrets. 1060

Creon. Out with them ; only speak them not for gain.

¹ The precise nature of the *electron* of the Greek is doubtful ; but Sardis leads us to think of the gold dust of Pactolos, and the name of some characteristic distinguishing it from other gold.

ANTIGONE

Teir. So is 't, I trow, in all that touches thee.

Creon. Know that thou shalt not bargain with my will.

Teir. Know, then, and know it well, that thou shalt
see

Not many winding circuits of the sun,
Before thou giv'st as quittance for the dead,
A corpse by thee begotten ; for that thou
Hast to the ground cast one that walked on earth,
And foully placed within a sepulchre
A living soul ; and now thou keep'st from them,
The Gods below, the corpse of one unblest,
Unwept, unhallowed, and in these things thou
Can'st claim no part, nor yet the Gods above ;
But they by thee are outraged ; and they wait,
The sure though slow avengers of the grave,
The dread Erinnyes of the mighty Gods,
For thee in these same evils to be snared.
Search well if I say this as one who sells
His soul for money. Yet a little while,
And in thy house the wail of men and women
Shall make it plain. And every city stirs
Itself in arms against thee, owning those
Whose limbs the dogs have buried, or fierce wolves,
Or wingèd birds have brought the accursèd taint
To region consecrate. Doom like to this,
Sure darting as an arrow to its mark,
I launch at thee, (for thou dost vex me sore,)
An archer aiming at the very heart,
And thou shalt not escape its fiery sting.
And now, O boy, lead thou me home again,
That he may vent his spleen on younger men,
And learn to keep his tongue more orderly,
With better thoughts than this his present mood.

1070

1080

1090

[*Exit.*

Chor. The man has gone, O king, predicting woe,
And well we know, since first our raven hair

ANTIGONE

Was mixed with grey, that never yet his words
Were uttered to our State and failed of truth.

Creon. I know it too, 'tis that that troubles me.
To yield is hard, but, holding out, to smite
One's soul with sorrow, this is harder still.

Chor. We need wise counsel, O Menœkeus' son.

Creon. What shall I do? Speak thou, and I'll obey.

Chor. Go then, and free the maiden from her tomb,¹¹⁰⁰
And give a grave to him who lies exposed.

Creon. Is this thy counsel? Dost thou bid me yield?

Chor. Without delay, O king, for lo! they come,
The Gods' swift-footed ministers of ill,
And in an instant lay the self-willed low.

Creon. Ah me! 'tis hard; and yet I bend my will
To do thy bidding. With necessity
We must not fight at such o'erwhelming odds.

Chor. Go then and act! Commit it not to others.

Creon. E'en as I am I'll go. Come, come, my men,
Present or absent, come, and in your hands
Bring axes: come to yonder eminence. 1110

And I, since now my judgment leans that way,
Who myself bound her, now myself will loose,

Too much I fear lest it should wisest prove

Maintaining ancient laws to end my life. [Exit.

STROPHE I

Chor. O Thou of many names,¹
Of that Cadmeian maid²
The glory and the joy,
Whom Zeus as offspring owns,
Zeus, thundering deep and loud,

¹ The exulting hopes of the Chorus, rising out of Creon's repentance, seem purposely brought into contrast with the tragedy which is passing while they are in the very act of chanting their hymns.

² The Cadmeian maid is Semele, the bride of Zeus, who perished when the God revealed himself as the thunderer.

ANTIGONE

Who watchest over famed Italia,¹
And reign'st o'er all the bays that Deo claims
On fair Eleusis' coast.²

1120

Bacchos, who dwell'st in Thebes, the mother-town
Of all thy Bacchant train,
Along Ismenos' stream,
And with the dragon's brood;³

ANTISTROPHE I

Thee, o'er the double peak
Of yonder height the blaze
Of flashing fire beholds,
Where nymphs of Corycos⁴
Go forth in Bacchic dance,
And by the flowery stream of Castaly,
And Thee, the ivied slopes of Nysa's hills,⁵
And vine-clad promontory,
(While words of more than mortal melody
Shout out the well-known name,)
Send forth, the guardian lord
Of the wide streets of Thebes.

1130

STROPHE II

Above all cities Thou,
With her, thy mother whom the thunder slew,

¹ Southern Italy, the Magna Græcia of the old geographers, is named as famous both for its wines and its *cultus* of Bacchos, perhaps also with a special allusion to the foundation of Thurii by the Athenians.

² Here, as in *Æd. Col.* (680), the poet speaks as one who had been initiated in the mysteries of Eleusis, where Bacchos, under the name Iacchos, received a special adoration.

³ The people descended from the dragon's teeth sown by Cadmos.

⁴ From Italia and Eleusis the Chorus passes to Parnassos, as the centre of the Bacchic *cultus*. On the twin peaks of that mountain flames were said to have been seen, telling of the presence of the God.

⁵ The "ivied slopes" are those of the Eubœan Nysa, where grew the wondrous vine described in *Fragm.* 235.

ANTIGONE

Dost look on it with love ;
 And now, since all the city bendeth low
 Beneath the sullen plague, 1140
 Come Thou with cleansing tread
 O'er the Parnassian slopes,
 Or o'er the moaning straits.¹

ANTISTROPHE II

O Thou, who lead'st the band,
 The choral band of stars still breathing fire,²
 Lord of the hymns of night,
 The child of highest Zeus ; appear, O king, 1150
 With Thyian maidens wild,
 Who all night long in dance,
 With frenzied chorus sing
 Thy praise, their lord, Iacchos.

Enter Messenger.

Mess. Ye men of Cadmos and Amphion's house,³
 I know no life of mortal man which I
 Would either praise or blame. 'Tis Fortune's chance
 That raiseth up, and Fortune bringeth low,
 The man who lives in good or evil plight ;
 And prophet of men's future there is none. 1160
 For Creon, so I deemed, deserved to be
 At once admired and envied, having saved
 This land of Cadmos from the hands of foes ;
 And, having ruled with fullest sovereignty,

¹ The "moaning straits" of the Euripos, if the God is thought of as coming from Nysa, the "slopes," if he comes from Parnassos.

² The imagery of the Bacchic *thiasos*, with its torch-bearers moving in rhythmic order, is transferred to the heavens, and the stars themselves are thought of as a choral band led by the Lord of life and joy.

³ In the myths of the foundation of Thebes, Amphion was said to have built its walls by the mere power of his minstrelsy, the stones moving, as he played, each into its appointed place.

ANTIGONE

He lived and prospered, joyous in a race
Of goodly offspring. Now, all this is gone ;
For when men lose the joys that sweeten life,
I cannot deem they live, but rather count
As if a breathing corpse. His heaped-up stores
Of wealth are large, so be it, and he lives
With all a sovereign's state ; and yet, if joy
Be absent, all the rest I count as nought,
And would not weigh them against pleasure's charm, 1170
More than a vapour's shadow.

Chor. What is this ?
What new disaster tell'st thou of our chiefs ?

Mess. Dead are they, and the living cause their death.

Chor. Who slays, and who is slaughtered ? Tell thy tale.

Mess. Hæmon is dead, slain, weltering in his blood.

Chor. By his own act, or by his father's hand ?

Mess. His own, in wrath against his father's crime.

Chor. O prophet ! true, most true, those words of thine.

Mess. Since things stand thus, we well may counsel take.

Chor. Lo ! Creon's wife comes, sad Eurydike. 1180
She from the house approaches, hearing speech
About her son, or else by accident.

Enter EURYDIKE.

Euryd. I on my way, my friends, as suppliant bound,
To pay my vows at Pallas' shrine, have heard
Your words, and so I chanced to draw the bolt
Of the half-opened door, when lo ! a sound
Falls on my ears, of evil striking home,
And terror-struck I fall in deadly swoon
Back in my handmaids' arms ; yet tell it me,
Tell the tale once again, for I shall hear, 1190
By long experience disciplined to grief.

ANTIGONE

Mess. Dear lady, I will tell thee : I was by,
And will not leave one word of truth untold.
Why should we smooth and gloze, where all too soon
We should be found as liars? Truth is still
The only safety. Lo! I went with him,
Thy husband, in attendance, to the edge
Of yonder plain, where still all ruthlessly
The corpse of Polyneikes lay exposed,
Mangled by dogs. And, having prayed to her,
The Goddess of all pathways,¹ and to Pluto, 1200
To temper wrath with pity, him they washed
With holy washing; and what yet was left
We burnt in branches freshly cut, and heaped
A high-raised grave from out his native soil,
And then we entered on the stone-paved home,
Death's marriage-chamber for the ill-starred maid.
And some one hears, while standing yet afar,
Shrill voice of wailing near the bridal bower,
By funeral rites unhallowed, and he comes
And tells my master, Creon. On his ears,
Advancing nearer, falls a shriek confused
Of bitter sorrow, and with groaning loud, 1210
He utters one sad cry, "Me miserable!
And am I then a prophet? Do I wend
This day the dreariest way of all my life?
My son's voice greets me. Go, my servants, go,
Quickly draw near, and standing by the tomb,
Search ye and see; and where the stone torn out
Shall make an opening, look ye in, and say
If I hear Hæmon's voice, or if my soul
Is cheated by the Gods." And then we searched,
As he, our master, in his frenzy bade us;

¹ Hecate, more or less identified with Persephone, and named here as the Goddess who, being the guardian of highways, was wroth with Thebes for the pollution caused by the unburied corpse of Polyneikes.

ANTIGONE

And, in the furthest corner of the vault,
 We saw her hanging by her neck, with cord
 Of linen threads entwined, and him we found
 Claspings her form in passionate embrace,
 And mourning o'er the doom that robbed him of her,
 His father's deed, and that his marriage bed,
 So full of woe. When Creon saw him there,
 Groaning aloud in bitterness of heart,
 He goes to him, and calls in wailing voice,
 "Poor boy! what hast thou done? Hast thou then
 lost

Thy reason? In what evil sinkest thou?
 Come forth; my child, on bended knee I ask thee." 1230
 And then the boy, with fierce, wild-gleaming eyes,
 Glared at him, spat upon his face, and draws,
 Still answering nought, the sharp two-handled sword.
 Missing his aim, (his father from the blow
 Turning aside,) in anger with himself,
 The poor ill-doomed one, even as he was,
 Fell on his sword, and drove it through his breast,
 Full half its length, and claspings, yet alive,
 The maiden's arm, still soft, he there breathes out
 In broken gasps, upon her fair white cheek,
 Swift stream of bloody shower. So they lie,
 Dead bridegroom with dead bride, and he has gained,
 Poor boy, his marriage rites in Hades' home, 1240
 And left to all men witness terrible,
 That man's worst ill is want of counsel wise.

[Exit EURYDIKE.

Chor. What dost thou make of this? She turneth
 back,

Before one word, or good or ill, she speaks.

Mess. I too am full of wonder. Yet with hopes
 I feed myself, she will not think it meet,
 Hearing her son's woes, openly to wail
 Out in the town, but to her handmaids there

ANTIGONE

Will give command to wail her woe at home.
Too trained a judgment has she so to err.

1250

Chor. I know not. To my mind, or silence hard,
Or vain wild cries, are signs of bitter woe.

Mess. Soon we shall know, within the house advancing,

If, in the passion of her heart, she hides
A secret purpose. Truly dost thou speak ;
There is a terror in that silence hard.

Chor. [*Seeing CREON approaching with the corpse of
HÆMON in his arms.*]

And lo! the king himself is drawing nigh,
And in his hands he bears a record clear,
No woe (if I may speak) by others caused,
Himself the great offender.

1260

Enter CREON, bearing HÆMON's body.

Creon. Woe! for the sins of souls of evil mood,
Stern, mighty to destroy!

O ye who look on those of kindred race,
The slayers and the slain,

Woe for mine own rash plans that prosper not!

Woe for thee, son; but new in life's career,
And by a new fate dying!

Woe! woe!

Thou diest, thou art gone,
Not by thine evil counsel, but by mine.

Chor. Ah me! Too late thou seem'st to see the
right.

1270

Creon. Ah me!

I learn the grievous lesson. On my head,
God, pressing sore, hath smitten me and vexed,
In ways most rough and terrible, (Ah me!)
Shattering my joy, as trampled under foot.
Woe! woe! Man's labours are but labour lost.

ANTIGONE

Enter Second Messenger.

Sec. Mess. My master! thou, as one who hast full store,
One source of sorrow bearest in thine arms,
And others in thy house, too soon, it seems,
Thou need'st must come and see. 1230

Creon. And what remains
Worse evil than the evils that we bear?

Sec. Mess. Thy wife is dead, that corpse's mother true,
Ill starred one, smitten with a blow just dealt.

Creon. O agony!
Haven of Death, that none may pacify,
Why dost thou thus destroy me?

[*Turning to Messenger.*] O thou who comest, bringing
in thy train

Woes horrible to tell,
Thou tramplest on a man already slain.
What say'st thou? What new tidings bring'st to me?
Ah me! ah me! 1230

Is it that now there waits in store for me
My own wife's death to crown my misery?

Ghor. Full clearly thou may'st see. No longer now
Does yon recess conceal her.

[*The gates open and show the dead body
of EURYDIKE.*]

Creon. Woe is me!
This second ill I gaze on, miserable,
What fate, yea, what still lies in wait for me?
Here in my arms I bear what was my son;
And there, O misery! look upon the dead.
Ah, wretched mother! ah, my son! my son! 1300

Sec. Mess. In frenzy wild she round the altar clung,
And closed her darkening eyelids, and bewailed

ANTIGONE

*The noble fate of Megareus,¹ who died
Long since, and then again that corpse thou hast ;
And last of all she cried a bitter cry
Against thy deeds, the murderer of thy sons.

Creon. Woe ! woe ! alas !

I shudder in my fear. Will no one strike
A deadly blow with sharp two-edgèd sword ?

Fearful my fate, alas !

1310

And with a fearful woe full sore beset.

Sec. Mess. She in her death charged thee with being
the cause

Of all their sorrows, these and those of old.

Creon. And in what way struck she the murderous
blow ?

Sec. Mess. With her own hand below her heart she
stabbed,

Hearing her son's most pitiable fate.

Creon. Ah me ! The fault is mine. On no one else,
Of all that live, the fearful guilt can come ;
I, even I, did slay thee, woe is me !

I, yes, I speak the truth. Lead me, ye guards
Lead me forth quickly ; lead me out of sight,
More crushed to nothing than is nothing's self.

1320

Chor. Thou counsellest gain, if gain there be in ills,
For present ills when shortest then are best.

Creon. Oh, come thou then, come thou,
The last of all my dooms, that brings to me
Best boon, my life's last day. Come then, oh come,
That never more I look upon the light.

1330

Chor. These things are in the future. What is near,
That we must do. O'er what is yet to come
They watch, to Whom that work of right belongs.

Creon. I did but pray for what I most desire.

¹ In the legend which Sophocles follows, Megareus, a son of Creon and Eurydike, had been offered up as a sacrifice to save the state from its dangers.

ANTIGONE

Chor. Pray thou for nothing then : for mortal man
There is no issue from a doom decreed.

Creon. [*Looking at the two corpses.*] Lead me then
forth, vain shadow that I am, 1346
Who slew thee, O my son, unwillingly,
And thee too—(O my sorrow!)—and I know not
Which way to look or turn. All near at hand
Is turned to evil ; and upon my head
There falls a doom far worse than I can bear.

Chor. Man's highest blessedness,
In wisdom chiefly stands ;
And in the things that touch upon the Gods,
'Tis best in word or deed
To shun unholy pride ;
Great words of boasting bring great punishments, 1350
And so to grey-haired age
Teach wisdom at the last.

ELECTRA

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

<i>Attendant foster-father to</i> ORESTES.	CLYTEMNESTRA, <i>mother of</i> ORESTES.
ORESTES, <i>son of</i> AGAMEMNON.	ELECTRA, } <i>sisters of</i>
PYLADES, <i>friend of</i> ORESTES.	CHRYSOTHEMIS, } ORESTES.
ÆGISTHOS, <i>husband of</i> CLYTEMNESTRA.	<i>Chorus of Argive Maidens.</i>

ARGUMENT.—It came to pass that when Agamemnon led the host of the Achæans against Troia, his wife, Clytemnestra, the daughter of Tyndareus, fell away from her faithfulness, partly because she was wroth, or feigned to be so, with her husband, for having sacrificed their daughter Iphigeneia to turn aside the wrath of Artemis, and obtain a favouring breeze for the ships of the Achæans; and partly because Ægisthos, son of Thyestes, the brother of Atreus, father of Agamemnon, had gained her to his will. And when Agamemnon returned from Troia to Mykenæ, Ægisthos and Clytemnestra slew him, and reigned over the Argives in his place, but Electra, his daughter, saved her brother Orestes, and sent him secretly in charge of a faithful servant to Strophios of Phokis, his father's friend. And when eight years had passed, and Electra had sent and received from him many secret messages, Orestes at last came, with his faithful friend Pylades, the son of Strophios, and the servant who had watched over him, to Mykenæ, that he might do as the God at Delphi had bidden him, and take vengeance on his

ELECTRA

father's murderers. And it chanced that when he came, his mother, Clytemnestra, had had a vision, which filled her with fear, and she sent her younger daughter, Chrysothemis, with funereal offerings to the tomb of Agamemnon. Electra meanwhile had never ceased to bewail her father's death, and because of this, her mother and Ægisthos had dealt harshly with her.

ELECTRA

SCENE.—MYKENÆ. *On one side the entrance of the Palace; on the other, in the background, the funeral mound of Agamemnon; Agora and Temples in the centre, ARGOS in the distance.*

Enter ORESTES, PYLADES, and Attendant.

Attend. Now, son of Agamemnon, who of old
Led our great hosts at Troy, 'tis thine to see
What long thou hast desired. For lo! there lies
The ancient Argos, which, with yearning wish,
Thou oft did'st turn to; here the sacred grove
Of her who wandered, spurred by ceaseless sting,
Daughter of Inachos:¹ and this, Orestes,
Is the wide agora, Lykeian named
In honour of the God who slew the wolves;²
Here on the left, the shrine of Hera famed;³
And where we stand, Mykenæ, rich in gold,
Thou look'st upon, in slaughter also rich,
The house of Pelops' line. Here, long ago,
After thy father's murder, I received thee,
At thy dear sister's hands, to kindred true;
And took thee, saved thee, reared thee in my home,

10

¹ Io, daughter of Inachos, beloved by Zeus, and driven over land and sea by Hera, was one of the special deities of Argos, and the country was sometimes distinguished from other districts bearing the same name by the epithet Inacheian.

² Of the many conjectures as to the meaning Lykeian, Sophocles adopts that which connected it with the idea of Apollo, as clearing the country from the wolves that troubled it.

³ The temple of Hera lay between Argos and Mykenæ, about a mile and a half from the former city.

ELECTRA

To this thy manhood, destined to avenge
Thy father's death. Now, therefore, O my son,
Orestes, and thou, Pylades, most dear
Of all true friends, we needs must quickly plan
What best to do. For lo! the sun's bright rays
Wake up the birds to tune their matin songs,
And star-decked night's dark shadows flee away;
Ye, then, before ye enter, taking rest,
The roof of living man, hold conference;
For as things are, we may not linger on:
The time is come for action.

Ores. Dearest friend,
Of servants found most faithful, still thou giv'st
Clear tokens of thy nobleness of heart
In all that touches us. For as the steed,
Though he be old, if good blood flows in him,
In danger's hour still loses not his fire,
But pricks his ears, so thou dost urge us on,
And tak'st thyself thy station in the van.
Wherefore, I tell thee what my mind approves,
And thou, give heed, full heed, to all my words;
And, if I miss the mark in aught, correct:
For I, when I had reached the Pythian shrine,
That I might learn by what device to wreak
My vengeance on my father's murderers,
Heard this from Phœbos, which thou too shalt learn,
That I myself, unarmed with shield or host,
Should subtly work the righteous deed of blood.
Since then we heard an oracle like this,
Do thou go in, whene'er occasion serves,
Within this house, and learn what passes there,
That, knowing all, thou may'st report it well;
Changed as thou art by age and lapse of years,
They will not know thee, nor, with those grey hairs,
Even suspect thee. And with this pretence
Go in, that thou a Phokian stranger art,

ELECTRA

Come from a man named Phanoteus; for he
Of all their friends is counted most in fame,
And tell them—yea, and add a solemn oath—
That some fell fate has brought Orestes' death,
In Pythian games,¹ from out the whirling car
Rolled headlong to the earth. This tale tell thou; 60
And we, first honouring my father's grave,
As the God bade us, with libations pure
And tresses from our brow, will then come back,
Bearing the urn well wrought with sides of bronze,
Which, thou know'st well, 'mid yonder shrubs lies hid,
That we with crafty words may bring to them
The pleasant news that my poor frame is gone,
Consumed with fire, to dust and ashes turned.
Why should this grieve me, when, by show of death,
In truth I safety gain, and win renown? 60
To me no speech that profits soundeth ill,
For often have I seen men known as wise,
Reported dead in words of idle tales,²
And then, when fortune brings them home again,
Gain more abundant honours. So I boast
That I, from out this rumour of my death,
Shall, like a meteor, blaze upon my foes,
But oh! thou fatherland, ye Gods of home,
Receive me, prosper me in this my way;
And thou, my father's house, (for lo! I come,
Sent by the Gods to cleanse thee righteously,) 70
Send me not back dishonoured from the land,
But lord of ancient wealth, and found at last
Restorer of my race. So far I've said:

¹ The mention of the Pythian games must be noted as an anachronism. The date assigned for their institution is B.C. 586.

² Orestes may be supposed to refer to Odysseus, who appeared and triumphed after the report of his death. There may possibly be a reference, intelligible to those who heard the play, to the story of Pythagoras, who, after an apparent death, returned to life, and preached the doctrine of the metempsychosis.

ELECTRA

And now, old friend, 'tis thine to watch thy task :
We twain go forth. The true, right time is come,
That mightiest master of all works of men.

Elec. [*Within.*] Woe, woe is me ! O misery !

Attend. [*To ORESTES.*] I thought, my son, but now I
heard a cry

As of some hand-maid wailing within doors.

Ores. And can it be Electra, helpless one ?
Shall we remain and listen to her plaint ?

Attend. In no wise. Let us not attempt to do
Aught else before what Loxias bade us do,
And start from that, upon thy father's grave
Pouring the lustral stream. For this shall bring
Our victory,¹ and strength in all we do.

[*Exeunt ORESTES, PYLADES, and Attendant.*

Enter ELECTRA, followed by a train of Maidens.

O holy light of day,
And air with earth commensurate,
Many the wailing songs,
Many the echoing blow,
On bosom stained with blood
Thou heardest, when the night
Of murky darkness ceased ;
And how, in all my vigils of the night
I wail my hapless sire,
It knows, the loathèd bed of hated house ;--
My sire, whom Ares fierce and murderous,
On alien shore received not as a guest,
But she, my mother, and her paramour,
Ægisthos, with the blood-stained hatchet, smote
As those that timber fell
Smite down the lofty oak.

¹ The two words, "victory and strength," habitually went together in the Pythian oracles and in formulæ of prayer. They were to an Athenian audience what "grace and mercy," "glory and honour," would be to us.

ELECTRA

And thou, my father, hast no pity gained 100
 From any one but me,
 Though thou a death hast died
 So grievous and so foul to look upon.

But I at least will ne'er
 Refrain mine eyes from weeping, while I live,
 Nor yet my voice from wail ;
 Not while I see this day,
 And yon bright twinkling stars ;
 But, like a nightingale
 Of its young brood bereaved,
 Before the gates I speak them forth to all.
 O house of Hades and Persephone, 110
 O Hermes of the abyss, and thou, dread Curse,¹
 And ye, Erinnyes, daughters of the Gods,
 Ye dreaded Ones who look
 On all who perish, slain unrighteously,
 On all whose bed is stealthily defiled,
 Come ye, and help, avenge my father's death ;
 Send me my brother here,
 For I alone must fail,
 Sorrow's great burden in the balance cast. 120

Chor. O child, Electra dear,
 Child of a mother guilty above all,
 Why dost thou ever wear thyself away
 In ceaseless, wailing cry,
 For him thy father, Agamemnon, slain,
 Long years ago by godless subtlety,
 Thy mother's, steeped in guile,
 By coward hand betrayed ?
 May he who did the deed
 (If this my wish be right)

¹ Hermes was the God who had led the soul of Agamemnon to Hades ; the Curse, that which he had uttered, when dying, against Clytemnestra.

ELECTRA

Perish for evermore !

Elec. Offspring of noble souls,
Ye come to soothe my woes ;
I know it, yea, I comprehend it all,
Nothing escapes my ken ;
And yet I will not leave my task undone,
Nor cease to wail my hapless father's fate.
Ye then who give me every token kind
Of true affection's bond,
Leave me, I pray, ah ! leave
To vent my sorrow thus.

139

Chor. And yet with groans and prayers,
From Hades' pool, where all that live must go,
Thy sire thou canst not raise, but passest on,
Lamenting ceaselessly,
From evil one might bear
To woe that baffles every remedy,
Where respite from our sorrows there is none.

140

Why, why, I ask, dost thou
Still in thy spirit seek
Those evils hard to bear ?
Elec. Childish and weak is he
Who learneth to forget
The parents that have perished miserably ;
Far better pleaseth me
The wailing one who "Itys, Itys,"¹ mourns,
The bird heartbroken, messenger of Zeus.

¹ The cry of "Itys," which the Greek ear found in the song of the nightingale, connected itself with the story of Tereus, king of Thrace, who married Procne, daughter of Pandion, king of Athens. Then doing violence to her sister Philomela, he tore out her tongue and imprisoned her, that she might not tell of the outrage. She, however, found means to tell her sister Procne by a piece of tapestry-work, and she, wroth with Tereus, slew his son Itys, and gave his flesh to his father that he might eat it. And then Zeus put forth his power, and changed Philomela into a nightingale, and Procne into a swallow, and Tereus into a hoopoo, and so the nightingale ever flies from the hoopoo and wails for Itys. Sophocles had dramatised the history in his *Tereus*, probably before the date of the *Electra*.

ELECTRA

Ah, Niobe!¹ with all thy countless woes

150

I count thee still divine,
Who in thy tomb of rock
Weepest for evermore.

Chor. Not unto thee alone,

My child, of those that live

Have grief and sorrow come ;

Nor sufferest thou aught more than those within
With whom thou sharest home and kith and kin,
Iphianassa and Chrysothemis ;

And one is mourning in a youth obscure,

Yet happy, too, in part,

Whom one day the Mykenians' glorious land

161

Shall welcome as the heir of noble race.

Coming to this our soil,

As sent by grace of Zeus,

Orestes, come at last.

Elec. Ah ! him I wait for with unwearied hope,

And go, ah ! piteous fate !

Childless, unwedded still ;

My cheeks are wet with tears,

And still I bear an endless doom of woe.

And he, alas ! forgets

All he has met with, all that I had taught.

What message goes from me

That is not mocked ? for still he yearns to come,

170

And yet he deigneth not,

Yearn though he may, to show himself to us.

Chor. Take heart, my child, take heart ;

Mighty in heaven He dwells,

Zeus, seeing, guiding all :

Resign to Him the wrath that vexes sore.

And as for them, the foes whom thou dost hate,

Nor grieve too much, nor yet forget them quite ;

¹ Niobe—comp. the note on Antigone, 823.

ELECTRA

Time is a calm and patient Deity :
For neither he who dwells
Where oxen graze on far Krisæan shore,
The boy who sprang from Agamemnon's loins,
Lives heedless of thy woe ;
Nor yet the God who reigns
By Acheron's dark shore.

180

Elec. And yet the larger portion of my life
Is gone without a hope,
And I am all too weak,

Who waste away in orphaned loneliness,
Whom no dear husband loves,

But, like an alien stranger in the house,
I do my task unmeet,

And tend the chambers where my father dwelt,
In this unseemly guise,

191

And stand at tables all too poorly filled.

Chor. Sad was his voice in that his homeward march,
And sad when that sharp blow
(There in his father's couch,)
Of brazen axe went straight ;
Guile was it that devised,
And lust that struck the blow,

Engendering foully foulest form of sin,
Whether it was a God,
Or one of mortal men,
That did the deed of guilt.

200

Elec. Ah, day of all that ever came to me,
Most horrible by far !

O night ! O sufferings, strange as wonderful,
Of banquets foul and dark !

Dread forms of death which he, my father, saw
Wrought out by their joint hands,

Who, traitorous, murdered him who was my life,
And so brought death to me.

May He who dwelleth on Olympus high,

ELECTRA

God, the Almighty One,
Give them for this to groan all grievously ;
And ne'er may they in prosperous days rejoice,
Who did such deeds as this. 219

Chor. Take heed, take heed, and utter speech no more.
Hast thou no thought from whence,
Into what evils dread,
Sorrows thou mak'st thine own,
Thou fallest piteously ?
For thou hast reaped excess of misery,
Still brooding over war
In thine unquiet heart ;
With kings 'tis ill to strive. 220

Elec. I was sore vexed with evils dire, yea, dire ;
I know it well ; my wrath escapes me not.
Yet in this hard, hard fate,
I will not cease from uttering woe on woe,
While life still holds me here.

For who is there, companions kind and true,
From whom to learn the speech that profiteth,
Whose thoughts befit the time ?

Leave me, oh, leave me, friends that fain would soothe.
For these my woes as endless shall be known, 221
And never from my wailings shall I cease,
Nor pause to count my tears.

Chor. And yet, in pure goodwill I speak to thee,
As mother faithful found,
Not to heap ills on ills.

Elec. What limit is there then to misery ?
What ? Is it noble to neglect the dead ?
Where has this custom grown ?
May I ne'er share their praise,
Nor, should I come to any form of good, 222
Dwell with it peaceably,
If I should stay my wailing sorrow's wings,
And leave my father shamed ?

ELECTRA

For if the dead, as dust and nothing found,
 Shall lie there in his woe,
 And they shall fail to pay
 The penalty of blood,

Then should all fear of Gods from earth decay,
 And all men's worship prove a thing of nought.

250

Chor. I came, my child, in earnest zeal for thee
 And for myself. But if I speak not well,
 Have thou thy way, and we will follow thee.

Elec. I feel some shame, ye women, if I seem
 To over-weary you with many tears :
 But hard compulsion forces me to this,
 Therefore bear with me. What maid nobly born,
 Seeing a father's sorrows, would not do
 As I am doing,—sorrows which, by night
 As well as day, I see bud forth and bloom,
 In nowise wither,—I who, first of all,
 Have on my mother's part, yes, hers who bore me,
 Found deadliest hate ; and then, in this my house,
 Companion with my father's murderers,
 I bow to them, and at their hands receive,
 Or suffer want. And next, I pray thee, think
 What kind of days I pass, beholding him,
 Ægisthos, sitting on my father's throne,
 And seeing him wear all his kingly robes,
 And pouring forth libations on the hearth
 Where his hands slew him ; last, and worst of all,
 I see that murderer in my father's couch,
 With her, my wretched mother, if that name
 Of mother I may give to one who sleeps
 With such an one as he ; and she is bold,
 And lives with that adulterer, fearing not
 The presence of Erinnyes, but, as one
 Who laughs in what she does, she notes the day
 In which she slew my father in her guile,
 And on it forms her choral band, and slays

300

370

ELECTRA

Her sheep each month, as victims to the Gods 290
 That give deliverance ;¹ I, poor hapless one,
 Beholding it, (ah misery !) within
 Bewail, and pine, and mourn the fatal feast,²
 Full of all woe, that takes my father's name,—
 I by myself alone. I dare not weep,
 Not even weep, as fain my heart would wish ;
 For she, that woman, noble but in words,
 Heaps on my head reproaches such as these :
 " O impious, hateful mood ! Has death deprived
 Thee only of a father ? Do none else 295
 Feel touch of sorrow ? Evil fate be thine,
 And never may the Gods that reign below
 Free thee from wailing ! " So she still reviles ;
 But when she hears one speak Orestes' name,
 As one day coming, then in maddened rage
 She comes and screams, " And art not thou the cause ?
 And is not this thy deed, who, stealing him,
 Orestes, from my hands, hast rescued him ?
 But know that thou shalt pay full price for this."
 So does she howl, and he too eggs her on,
 That spouse of hers as noble, standing near, 300
 That utter coward, that mere mischief, he
 Who with the help of women wages war.
 And I, who wait Orestes evermore
 To come and stop these evils, waste away ;
 For he, still ever meaning to effect
 Some great achievement, brings to nothingness
 All my hopes here, and all hopes far away.
 At such a time, my friends, there is no room
 For self-control or measured reverence ;

¹ The monthly festival which Clytemnestra kept was after the pattern of new-moon feasts or others regulated by them.

² The "feast of Agamemnon" had become proverbial as the type of treacherous hospitality, and it seems probable that the poet so framed Electra's words as to call up that association in the minds of his hearers.

ELECTRA

Ills force us into choosing words of ill.

Chor. Tell us, I pray, if thus thou speakest out, 310
Ægisthos being near, or gone from home.

Elec. From home, most surely; do not dream that I,
If he were near, had ventured out of doors ;
But, as it happens, he is gone a-field.

Chor. So much the more would I take heart to hold
My converse with thee, if indeed 'tis so.

Elec. Yes, he is gone. Ask thou whate'er thou wilt.

Chor. Well, then, I ask thee of thy brother first,
Comes he, or stays he still ? I fain would know.

Elec. He speaks of coming ; yet he nothing does.

Chor. One who works great things oft is slow in them. 320

Elec. I was not slow when I did save his life.

Chor. Take heart. Right noble he, to help his friends.

Elec. I trust, or else I had not lived till now.

Chor. Not one word more ; for coming from the house
I see thy sister, of one father born,
And of one mother, fair Chrysothemis ;
And in her hand she brings sepulchral gifts,
Such as are offered to the souls that sleep.¹

Enter CHRYSOTHEMIS, bearing funeral offerings.

Chrys. What plaint is this thou utterest, sister dear,
Here at the outlet of the palace gates ?
And wilt not learn the lessons time should teach 331
To yield no poor compliance to a wrath
That is but vain ? This much myself I know ;
I grieve at what befalls us. Had I strength,
I would show plainly what I think of them ;
But now it seems most wise in weather foul,
To slack my sail, and make no idle show
Of doing something when I cannot harm ;
And on this wise I wish thee too to act ;

¹ These commonly consisted of milk, honey, and oil. Comp.
896.

ELECTRA

While yet I grant that what thou think'st is just,
Not what I say. But if I wish to live
In freedom, I must bow to those that rule.

340

Elec. Strange is it thou, who callest such a man
Thy father, should'st forget him, and should'st care
For such a mother. All this good advice
Thou giv'st to me is not thine own but hers,
Thy lesson learnt by rote. Take then thy choice ;
Or thou hast lost thy reason, or, if sane,
Thou hast no memory of thy dearest friends,
Who said'st but now, that, had'st thou strength enough,
Thou would'st make plain the hate thou hast for them ;
And yet when I am working to avenge
Thy father, wilt not join me, and would'st fain
Turn me aside from action. Is there not
In this, besides all else, a coward's heart ?
Tell me (yea, hear) what profit should I have
Were I to cease from tears ? Do I not live ?
In evil case I own, and yet for me
Enough ; and these I vex, and so I give
Due honour to the dead,—if they can be
Or pleased or thankful. Thou, with that thy hate,
Hatest in words, and yet in act dost live
In friendship with thy father's murderers.
Never would I, no, not though one should bring
To me the gifts which thou rejoicest in,
Give way to them. No ! Let thy board be spread
With dainties rich, and let thy life be full ;
*My only food be this, to spare myself
What most would pain. I covet not thy place,
Nor, wert thou wise, would'st thou. But, as it is,
When thou might'st be the child of noblest father,
Choose to be called thy mother's. Thus shalt thou
To most men seem contemptible and base,
Forsaking thy dead father and thy friends.

350

360

Chor. By all the Gods, I pray thee, cease from wrath ;

ELECTRA

In both your words, some profit may be found,
If thou from her would'st learn, and she from thee. 370

Chrys. I, O my friends, am somewhat used to hear
Her words ; nor had I now recurred to them,
But that I heard of evil drawing near,
Which soon shall stop her long protracted wails.

Elec. Tell then this dreadful evil. Hast thou aught
To tell me more than what I suffer now,
I will resist no longer.

Chrys. All I know
Myself, I'll tell thee ; for their purpose is,
Unless thou ceaseest from thy wailings loud,
To send thee where thou never more shalt see
The light of day, but in a dungeon cave, 380
Immured alive, beyond our country's bounds,
Shalt sing thy song of sorrow. Take good heed,
And do not, when thou sufferest, all too late,
Cast then the blame on me. Be wise in time.

Elec. And is it thus they have decreed to treat me ?

Chrys. Beyond all doubt, when home Ægisthos comes.

Elec. If this be all, would God he may come soon.

Chrys. What evil prayer is this, poor sister mine ?

Elec. That he may come, if this his purpose be. 390

Chrys. What would'st thou suffer ? Whither turn thy
thoughts ?

Elec. To flee as far as may be from you all.

Chrys. Hast thou no care for this thy present life ?

Elec. A goodly life for men to wonder at !

Chrys. So might it be, if thou would'st wisdom learn.

Elec. Teach me no baseness to the friends I love.

Chrys. I teach not that, yet kings must be obeyed.

Elec. Fawn as thou wilt ; thy fashion is not mine.

Chrys. Yet is it well through rashness not to fall.

Elec. If fall we must, we'll fall our father helping.

Chrys. Our father, so I deem, will pardon this. 400

Elec. These words will win due praises from the vile.

ELECTRA

Chrys. Wilt thou not yield and hearken to my words?

Elec. Not so; ne'er may I be so reft of sense.

Chrys. I then will go the way that I was sent.

Elec. And whither goest thou? Whose the gifts thou bring'st?

Chrys. Mother to father bids me pour libations.

Elec. How say'st thou? To the man whom most she hates?

Chrys. "The man she slew"—'Tis that thou fain would'st say.

Elec. Who gave this counsel? Who has this approved?

Chrys. 'Tis, as I think, some terror of the night. 410

Elec. Gods of my fathers! Be ye with me now!

Chrys. And does this terror give thee confidence?

Elec. If thou would'st tell the vision, I should know

Chrys. I know it not, but just in briefest tale.

Elec. Ah, tell me that; brief words ere now have laid Men low in dust, and raised them up again.

Chrys. A rumour runs that she our father's presence (Yes, thine and mine) a second time to light

Saw coming, and he stood upon the hearth,

And took the sceptre which he bore of old,¹ 420

Which now Ægisthos bears, and fixed it there,

And from it sprang a sucker fresh and strong,

And all Mykenæ rested in its shade.

This tale I heard from some one who was near

When she declared her vision to the Sun;²

But more than this I heard not, save that she

Now sends me hither through that fright of hers.

[ELECTRA, wild and impassioned, is about to speak.
And now by all the Gods of kith and kin,

¹ The words of Homer (*Iliad*, ii. 101) had given a special fame and import to the sceptre of Agamemnon.

² The prayer is told to the Sun, as the great dispeller of the dreams of darkness. Comp. 637. There is, perhaps, also a special reference to the local worship of the Sun at Argos. An altar to the Sun-God Helios, stood on the way from Argos to Mykenæ.

ELECTRA

I pray thee, hearken to me ; do not fall
Through lack of counsel ; if thou turn'st me back,
In trouble sore thou 'lt seek me yet again.

430

Elec. Ah, sister dear, of what thy hands do bear
Put nothing on the tomb ; for nature's law
Forbids it as unholy thus to bring
Funereal offerings, lustral waters pour,
From wife unfriendly, on a father's grave.
* No ! cast them to the rivers, hide them deep
In dust where never aught of them shall come
To where my father sleeps ; but when she dies,
Let them be stored below as gifts for her.
For, surely, were she not the boldest found
Among all women, ne'er would she have poured
These hateful offerings o'er the man she slew.
Think, if the dead who sleeps in yonder tomb
Will welcome kindly gifts like these from her,
By whom, most foully slain as hated foe,
His feet and hands were lopped off shamefully,
Who wiped upon his head the blood-stained knife,
As if to purge the guilt.¹ And dost thou think
To bring these gifts redeeming her from guilt ?
Not so. Nay, put them by, and then do thou,
Cutting the highest locks that crown thy head,
Yea, and mine also, poor although I be,
(Small offering, yet 'tis all the store I have,)
Give to him, yes, this lock, untrimmed, unmeet
For suppliant's vow, and this my girdle, decked
With no gay fringe. And ask thou, falling low,
That he will come to us in mood of grace,
From out the earth, a helper 'gainst our foes,
And that his son, Orestes, with a hand

440

450

¹ The words bring before us a curious phase of superstition. To mutilate the corpse of a murdered man was to deprive him of the power to take vengeance. To wipe the murderous weapon on his hair was not merely a symbol, but a charm. His blood was to be on his own head.

ELECTRA

Victorious, trample upon those his foes,
In fullest life returning, so that we
Hereafter may with gifts more bounteous come
To deck his grave than those we offer now.

I think, for one, I surely think that he
Has sent these dark, unsightly dreams to her ;

469

But be this as it may, my sister, come
And do this service, for thyself and me,
Nor less for him, of all men most beloved,
Our father, now in Hades slumbering.

Chor. The maiden speaks with filial reverence ;
And thou, dear friend, if thou art wise, wilt do
What so she counsels.

Chrys. I will do it then.

*It is not meet with two to wrangle still,
Debating of the right, but haste and act.
But if I thus essay this enterprise,
By all the Gods, my friends, be hushed and still ;
For if my mother hears it, well I trow
That what I dare will end full bitterly.

470

STROPHE

Chor. If wisdom fail me not,
As seer misled by doubtful auguries,
And wanting counsel wise,
She comes, true augur with foreshadowing tread,
Vengeance, with hands that bear
The might of righteousness :
She comes, my child, full soon, in hot pursuit :
And through my veins there springs a courage new,
Hearing but now these dreams
That come with favouring gale ;
For he, thy father, King of all Hellenes,
Will not forget for aye,
Nor will that hatchet with its double edge,
Wrought out in bronze of old,

480

ELECTRA

Which laid him low in death
With vilest contumely.

ANTISTROPHE

And She shall also come,
Dread form, with many a foot, and many a hand,
Erinnyes shod with brass, 400
Who lieth still in ambush terrible :
For there has come to those
For whom it was not right,
The hot embrace of marriage steeped in blood,
Of evil omen, bed and bride alike ;
But, above all, this thought
Fills heart and soul, that ne'er
The boding sign will come unblamed to those
Who did the deed, or shared ;
Lo ! men can find no prophecies in dreams, 500
Nor yet in words divine,
Unless it gain its goal,
This vision of the night.

EPODE

Ah, in the olden time,
Thou chariot race of Pelops, perilous,
How did'st thou come to this our father-land
In long-enduring gloom ?
For since he slept beneath the waters deep,
Poor Myrtilos,¹ who fell,
Cast headlong from the chariot bright with gold, 510
Both root and branch destroyed,

¹ Here, as in the case of " Itys, Itys " (l. 148), we have a reference to myths, which Sophocles had taken as the subjects of his own dramas. The story of Myrtilos was briefly, that he enabled Pelops to win the chariot-race against CEnomaos, and so to gain his daughter Hippodameia and become king of Pisa ; that then Pelops, unwilling to give him his reward, or suspecting him of loving Hippodameia, threw him headlong from Cape Geræstos. Myrtilos, as he died, uttered a curse on Pelops, and this was the starting-point of all the evils of his house.

ELECTRA

*There has not left our master's lordly house
All shame and ignominy.

Enter CLYTEMNESTRA, followed by an Attendant.

Clytem. Thou, as it seems, dost take thine ease abroad,
Ægisthos being absent, who has charged
That thou should'st not, being seen without the gates,
Disgrace thy friends. But now, since he is gone,
For me thou little carest. Yea, thou say'st
Full many a time to many men, that I
Am over-bold, and rule defying right,
Insulting thee and thine. But I disclaim
All insult, and but speak of thee the ill
I hear so often from thee. Evermore,
Thy father, and nought else, is thy pretext ;
As that he died by me By me? Right well
I know 'tis true. That deed deny I not,
For Justice seized him, 'twas not I alone ;
And thou should'st aid her, wert thou wise of heart,
Since that thy father, whom thou mournest still,
Alone of all the Hellenes had the heart
To sacrifice thy sister to the Gods,
Although, I trow, his toil was less than mine,
And little knew he of my travail-pangs.
And now, I ask thee, tell me for whose sake
He slew her? "For the Argives," sayest thou?
They had no right to seek my daughter's death ;
But if he killed mine for another's sake,
His brother Menelaos', should he not
Be righteously requited? Had not he
Two sons,¹ who it was fit should die far more
Than this my daughter, seeing they were born
Of father and of mother for whose sake
The armament went forth? Or was it so

520

530

540

¹ In Homer (*Iliad*, iii. 175; *Odyss.* iv. 112), Helen appears as bearing one child only, Hermione, to Menelaos. Sophocles follows a later form of the legend.

ELECTRA

That Hades had a special lust to feast
 Upon my children rather than on hers?
 Or was it that her father cast aside,
 Cold-blooded, hard, all yearning for my child,
 Yet cared for Menelaos? Was he not
 In this a reckless father found, and base?
 I answer, Yes, though thou refuse assent:
 And she that died would say it, could she speak.
 I then feel no remorse for what is done;
 But if I seem to thee as base in heart,

556

*First judge thou right, then blame thy next of kin.

Elec. This time, at least, thou wilt not say that I,
 Being first to vex, then heard these words from thee;
 But, if thou giv'st me leave, I fain would plead
 For him who died, and for my sister too.

Clytem. I give thee leave. Had'st thou thus spoken
 always,

To list to thee had given me less annoy.

Elec. Thus speak I then to thee—Thou say'st thy hand
 Did slay my father! Is there aught of shame
 Than this more shameful, whether thou can'st urge,
 Or not, the plea of justice? But I say
 Thou did'st not justly slay him, but wast led
 By vile suggestion of the coward base
 Who now lives with thee. Next, I pray thee, ask
 The huntress Artemis what guilt restrained
 The many winds in Aulis; or my voice
 Shall tell thee; for from her thou may'st not learn.
 My father once, as I have heard the tale,
 Taking his sport within the holy grove
 The Goddess calls her own, had raised a deer,
 Dappled, and antlered, and in careless mood
 Boasts loudly at the death.¹ And therefore she,
 Leto's fair daughter, in her wrath detained

568

571

¹ As the legend ran, the special form of the boast was, that he had surpassed Artemis in skill of chase.

ELECTRA

The Achæans that my father might perforce
Slay his own daughter, in the balance weighæ
Against that quarry. Thus the matter stood
As to that offering. Other means were none
To free the army, or for homeward voyage,
Or yet for Ilion. Therefore sore constrained
And struggling, hardly at the last he wrought
The act of sacrifice, and not through love
For Menelaos. But had it been so,
Had he done this with wish to profit him,
(For I will take thy premiss,) ought he then
To die by thine hand? Why, what right is this?
See to it, giving men a law like this, 590
If thou but cause fresh trouble to thyself,
And change of purpose bringing late regret;
For, should we evermore take blood for blood,
Thou would'st fall first, if thou did'st get thy due.
See to it well, lest thus thy vain pretence
Be found as nought. For tell me, if thou wilt,
In recompense for what dost thou now do
Deed of all deeds most shameful, who dost sleep
With that red-handed felon who with thee
Murdered my father, and to him dost bear
New children, while thou castest out from thee
Those born before, right seed of righteous sire? 590
How shall I praise these deeds? or wilt thou say
That thus thou takest vengeance for thy child?
Basely enough, if thou should'st say it. Lo!
It is not good to wed an enemy,
E'en in a daughter's cause. But since to speak
A word of counsel is not granted us,
Though thou dost love to speak all words of ill,
That "we revile a mother;"—yet I look
On thee as more my mistress than my mother,
Living a woeful life, by many ills
Encompassed which proceed from thee, and him, 600

ELECTRA

The partner of thy guilt. That other one,
My poor Orestes, hardly 'scaped from thee,
Drags on a weary life. Full oft hast thou
Charged me with rearing him to come at last
A minister of vengeance; and I own,
Had I but strength, be sure of this, 'twere done.
For this then, even this, proclaim aloud
To all men, as thou wilt, that I am base,
Or foul of speech, or full of shamelessness:
For if I be with such things conversant,
Then to thy breeding I bring no disgrace.

Chor. I see she breathes out rage—but whether right
Be on her side, for this no care I see. 610

Clytem. And why should I give heed to one like her,
Who thus her mother scorns? And at her age!
Does she not seem to thee as one prepared
To go all lengths, and feel no touch of shame?

Elec. Know well, I do feel shame for all I do,
Though thou think'st otherwise, and well I know
I do things startling, most unmeet for me;
But thy fixed hate and these thy deeds perforce
Constrain me still to do them. Still it holds, 620
Base deeds by base are learnt and perfected.

Clytem. Thou shameless creature! I then, and my
words,

And my deeds too, they make thee prate too much.

Elec. Thou sayest it, not I; for thou dost do
The deed: and deeds will find their fitting words.

Clytem. Now by my mistress, Artemis, I swear,
For this thy daring thou shalt pay in full
When back Ægisthos comes.

Elec. Now look you there!
Thou'rt swayed by fury, though thou gav'st me leave
To speak whate'er I would, and can'st not learn
To play a listener's part!

Clytem. And wilt thou not

ELECTRA

Give leave to do my rites with clamour hushed, 630
 Seeing that I let thee speak thy whole mind out?

Elec. I let thee, bid thee, do them. Charge not thou
 My lips with folly. Now, I speak no more

[Retires to the back of the stage.]

Glytem. Do thou then, my attendant, bring the gifts
 Of many fruits, that I may breathe my prayers
 To this our King for respite from the fears
 Which now possess me. Hear, O Phœbos, Thou
 Our true deliverer, hear my secret speech ;
 For this my prayer is not among my friends,
 Nor is it fit to bring it all to light,
 While she is near me still, lest in her mood 640
 Of envy, and with cry of many tongues,
 She spread the vain report through all the town ;
 But hear thou me ; for thus I make my prayer ;
 The vision which I looked on in the night
 Of doubtful dreams, grant me, Lykeian king,
 If they are good, their quick accomplishment ;
 If adverse, send them on mine adversaries ;
 And if there be that wish, by craft and guile,
 To hurl me from the wealth I now enjoy,
 Suffer them not, but ever let me live 650
 With life unharmed, and sway the Atreidæ's house,
 With these their sceptres, dwelling with the friends
 Whom now I dwell with, passing prosperous days
 With all my children, who nor hatred bring
 Nor bitter sorrow. This, Lykeian king,
 Apollo, hear all pitiful, and grant
 To all of us, as we implore thee now ;
 All else, though I be silent, I will deem
 Thou, being a God, dost know. One well may think
 The sons of Zeus see all things.

Enter the Attendant of ORESTES.

Attend.

Might I know, 660

ELECTRA

Ye ladies, if these dwellings that I see
Are those of King Ægisthos?

Chor. Even so!

Thou guessest well, O stranger.

Attend. Am I right

In once more guessing that his wife stands here?
For sure her mien bespeaks her sovereignty.

Chor. Right, more than ever. Lo, she standeth there.

Attend. All hail, O queen; I bring thee tidings good,
Thee and Ægisthos also, from a friend.

Clytem. I hail the omen; but I fain would know
This first, what man has sent thee here to us.

Attend. The Phokian Phanoteus, discharging thus 670
A weighty task.

Clytem. And what its nature, pray?
Tell me, O stranger; for right well I know
Thou from a friend wilt bring us friendly words.

Attend. Orestes. . . . He is dead. That word tells all.

Elec. O wretched me! This day I perish too.

Clytem. What say'st thou, stranger? What? . .
Heed not her words.

Attend. Orestes. . . . He is dead—I say again.

Elec. Ah me! I perish utterly. All's lost.

Clytem. Look thou to what concerns thee. But do
thou, [To Attendant of ORESTES.]

O stranger, tell us truly how he died.

Attend. For this end was I sent; and I will tell 680
All as it happened. He then journeyed forth
To those great games which Hellas counts her pride,
To join the Delphic contests;¹ and he heard
The herald's voice, with loud and clear command,
Proclaim, as coming first, the chariot race:

¹ Historically there is an anachronism here. The earlier contests at Delphi were confined to music, and the date given for the first Pythian games is, Ol. 47, 2 (B.C. 586). So, too, the four-horsed chariot, and the presence of Greeks from Libya, belong to the poet's own time rather than to the Homeric period.

ELECTRA

And so he entered radiant, every eye
 Admiring as he passed. And in the race
 He equalled all the promise of his form
 In those his rounds, and so with noblest prize
 Of conquest left the ground. And, summing up
 In fewest words what many scarce could tell,
 I know of none in strength and act like him ;
 But one thing know, for having won the prize
 In all the five-fold forms of race which they,¹
 The umpires, had proclaimed for those that ran 694
 The ground's whole length and back, he then was hailed,
 Proclaimed an Argive, and his name Orestes,
 His son who once led Hellas' glorious host,
 The mighty Agamemnon. So far well.
 But when a God will injure, none can 'scape,
 Strong though he be. For lo ! another day,
 When, as the sun was rising, came the race
 Swift-footed, of the chariot and the horse,
 He entered there, with many charioteers ; 100
 One an Achæan, one from Sparta, two
 From Libya, who with four-horsed chariots came,
 And he with these, with swift Thessalian mares,
 Came as the fifth ; a sixth with bright bay colts
 Came from Ætolia ; and the seventh was born
 In far Magnesia ; and the eighth, by race
 An Ænian, with white horses ; and the ninth
 From Athens came, the city built of God ;
 Last, a Bœotian, tenth in order, came,
 And made the list complete.² And so they stood—

¹ The order of the Delphic games was as follows :—Early in the morning the umpires (Hellanodikæ) sent the herald to proclaim their opening. They began with foot races, long and short ; about noon came the *pentathlon* (leaping, foot-race, discus, spear-throwing, wrestling), later the chariot-race. The "five-fold forms of race" (if the reading be correct) refer to variations in the rules or length of the course, not to the *pentathlon*, strictly so called.

² The choice of nations mentioned by the poet was doubtless far from being capricious. Some are named (the Achæan, Magnesian,

ELECTRA

When the appointed umpires fixed by lot, 710
 And placed the cars in order ; and with sound
 Of brazen trump they started. Cheering all
 Their steeds at once, they shook the reins, and then
 The course was filled with all the clash and din
 Of rattling chariots, and the dust rose high ;
 And all commingled, sparing not the goad,
 That each might pass his neighbour's axle-trees,
 And horses' hot, hard breathings ; for their backs
 And chariot-wheels were white with foam, and still
 The breath of horses smote them ; and he, come
 Just where the last stone marks the course's goal, 720
 Turning the corner sharp, and, letting go
 The right-hand trace-horse, pulled the nearer in ;
 And so at first the chariots keep their course ;
 But then the unbroken colts the Ænian owned
 Rush at full speed, and, turning headlong back,
 Just as they closed their sixth round or their seventh,
 Dash their heads right against the chariot wheels
 Of those who came from Barkè. And from thence,
 From that one shock, each on the other crashed,
 They fell o'erturned, and Crissa's spacious plain 730
 Was filled with wreck of chariots. Then the man
 From Athens, skilled and wily charioteer,
 Seeing the mischief, turns his steeds aside,
 At anchor rides, and leaves the whirling surge
 Of man and horse thus raging. Last of all,
 Keeping his steeds back, waiting for the end,
 Orestes came. And when he sees him left,
 His only rival, then, with shaken rein,
 Urging his colts, he follows, and they twain
 Drove onward both together, by a head, 740

Ænian, Thessalian, Bœotian, Argive) as conspicuous in the Amphic-
 tyonic league. The Spartan, as the rival of the Achæan, though
 having a more favourable start, falls into the background. The
 Libyans and Ætolians are named as famous for their chariot-races,
 and so enhancing the glory of the Athenian victor.

ELECTRA

Now this, now that, their chariots gaining ground ;
 And all the other rounds in safety passed.
 Upright in upright chariot still he stood,
 Ill-starred one ; then the left rein letting loose
 Just as his horse was turning, unawares
 He strikes the furthest pillar, breaks the spokes
 Right at his axle's centre, and slips down
 From out his chariot, and is dragged along,
 With reins dissevered. And, when thus he fell,
 His colts tore headlong to the ground's mid-space :
 And when the host beheld him fallen thus
 From off the chariot, they bewailed him sore,
 So young, so noble, so unfortunate, 750
 Now hurled upon the ground, and now his limbs
 To heaven exposing. Then the charioteers
 Full hardly keeping back the rush of steeds,
 Freed the poor corpse so bloody, that not one
 Of all his friends would know him ; and his body
 They burnt upon the pyre ; and now they bear,
 The chosen of the Phokians that have come,
 In a poor urn of bronze, a mighty form
 Reduced to these sad ashes, that for him
 May be a tomb within his fatherland. 760
 Such is my tale, full sad, I trow, to hear,
 But unto those who saw it as we saw,
 The greatest of all evils I have known.

Chor. Woe, woe ! So perish, root and branch, it seems,
 The race of those our lords of long ago.

Glytem. O Zeus ! What means this . . . Shall I say,
 good news ?

Or fearful, yet most gainful ? Still 'tis sad
 If by my sorrows I must save my life.

Attend. Why does my tale, O queen, thus trouble thee ?

Glytem. Wondrous and strange the force of motherhood !
 Though wronged, a mother cannot hate her children. [770

Attend. We then, it seems, are come to thee in vain.

ELECTRA

Clytem. Nay, not in vain. How could it be in vain ?
 Since thou bring'st proofs that he is dead, who, born
 Child of my heart, from breasts that gave him suck
 Then turned aside, and dwelt on foreign soil
 In banishment ; and since he left our land
 Ne'er came to see me, but with dreadful words,
 His father's death still casting upon me,
 Spake out his threats ; so that nor day nor night 180
 I knew sweet sleep, but still the sway of Time
 Led on my life, as one condemned to death.
 But now, for lo ! this day has stopped all fear
 From her and him, for she was with me still,
 The greater mischief, sucking out my life,
 My very heart's blood : now, for all her threats,
 We shall live on and pass our days in peace.

Elec. Ah, wretched me ! for now I can but mourn,
 Orestes, at thine evil case, thus dying,
 By this thy mother scorned. Can this be well ? 790

Clytem. Not so with thee. For him what is well.

Elec. Hear this, thou Power, avenging him who died !

Clytem. Right well she heard, and what she heard hath
 wrought.

Elec. Heap scoff on scoff ; thou'rt fortune's darling now.

Clytem. Thou and Orestes, will ye check me now ?

Elec. We, we are checked, and far from checking thee.

Clytem. [To Attendant.] Thou would'st deserve much
 praise, if thou hast checked,

O stranger, that loud cry of many tongues.

Attend. And may I then depart, my task being done ?

Clytem. Nay, nay ; thou would'st not then fare worthily
 Of me, or of the friend that sent thee here ; 800
 Come in, and leave this girl to cry without,
 And wail her own misfortunes and her friends'.

[*Exeunt* CLYTEMNESTRA and Attendant.]

Elec. And does she seem to you, that hateful one,
 As one who grieves in bitter pain of heart,

ELECTRA

To wail and weep full sorely for her son
 Who died so sadly ? Nay, (ah, wretched me !)
 She wends her way exulting. Ah, Orestes !
 Dear brother, in thy death thou slayest me ;
 For thou art gone, bereaving my poor heart
 Of all the little hope that yet remained, 810
 That thou would'st come, a living minister
 Of vengeance for thy father and for me,
 Me miserable. Now whither shall I turn ?
 For now I am indeed alone, bereaved
 Of thee and of my father. Now once more
 I must live on in bondage unto those
 Of all mankind most hateful far to me,
 My father's murderers. Goes it well with me ?
 But I at least through all the time to come
 Will not dwell with them, but at this their gate,
 All reckless, friendless, waste away my life ;
 And then, if one of those that dwell within
 Is wroth with this, why, let him slay me straight ; 820
 I'll thank him, if he kill me ; should I live
 There is but sorrow ; wish for life is none.

Chor. Where then the bolts of Zeus,

And where the glorious Sun,

If, seeing deeds like these,

They hold their peace, and hide ?

Elec. [*Sobbing.*] Alas, ah me, ah woe !

Chor. My child, why weepest thou ?

Elec. Fie on it, fie,

Chor. Hush, hush, be not too bold.

Elec. Thou wilt but break my heart. 830

Chor. What meanest thou ?

Elec. If thou suggestest any hope from those
 So clearly gone to Hades, then on me,
 Wasting with sorrow, thou wilt trample more.

Chor. And yet I know that King Amphiaraos¹

¹ Amphiaraos, seer as well as warrior, knowing by his art what

ELECTRA

Was taken in the toils of golden snare,
By woman's craft, and now below the earth

Elec. [*Sobbing.*] Ah me ! ah me !

840

Chor. He reigns in fullest life.

Elec. Fie on it, fie.

Chor. Yes, fie indeed ; for she,

Fell traitress

Elec. Perished, you would say ?

Chor. E'en so.

Elec. I know, I know it. One was left to care¹
For him who suffered. None is left to me ;
For he who yet remained is snatched away.

Chor. Most piteous thou, and piteous is thy lot.

Elec. That know I well, too well,

850

In this my life, which through the months runs on,
Filled full of grievous fears,
And bitter, hateful ills.

Chor. We saw what thou dost mourn.

Elec. Cease, cease, to lead me on

Where now not one is left

Chor. What say'st thou ? What ?

Elec. Where not one helper comes,
From all the hopes of common fatherhood
And stock of noble sire.

Chor. Death is the lot of all.

860

Elec. What ? Is it all men's lot

would be the issue of Polyneikes's expedition against Thebes, at first refused to join, but afterwards yielded to the persuasion of his wife Eriphyle, whom Polyneikes had bribed. When the Argives fled, he and his four-horse chariot were smitten with the thunderbolt of Zeus, and the earth opened and swallowed him up. The Chorus speaks of him as still reigning, in reference to the fact that many oracles were supposed to be inspired by him ; and suggests the thought that Agamemnon, too, in the unseen world of the dead, may yet be reigning, and so may work out vengeance on the evil-doers.

¹ Amphiaraios, before leaving Argos, had charged his sons, Alcmæon and Amphilocho, to take vengeance on their mother, and this Alcmæon did. Here, as before, Sophocles refers to a subject that he himself had dramatised in his tragedy of Eriphyle.

ELECTRA

In that fierce strife of speed,
To fall, as he fell, by an evil fate,

In severed reins entangled ?

Chor. Wondrous and dark that doom.

Elec. I trow it was, if in a strange land, he,
Without my helping hands

Chor. Oh, horror ! horror !

Elec. Was buried with no sepulture from us,
Nor voice of wailing.

870

Enter CHRYSOTHEMIS, running eagerly.

Chrys. In pure delight, dear sister, thus I rush,
My maiden grace abandoning, to come
With swiftest foot ; for lo ! I bring great joy
And respite from the ills thou long hast borne,
And still did'st wail.

Elec. And whence can'st thou have found
Help for my woes where healing there is none ?

Chrys. Orestes comes at last. Count this as sure,
Hearing my words, as that thou see'st me here.

Elec. What ! Art thou mad, poor wretch, and so dost
mock

At thine own sorrows, and at mine as well ?

880

Chrys. Nay ! By our father's hearth, I do not speak
These things in scorn, but say that he is come.

Elec. Ah, wretched me ! And whose word is it then
That thou hast heard with such credulity ?

Chrys. I, of myself, no other, clearest proof
Have seen, and therefore I believe this thing.

Elec. What hast thou seen, poor soul ; what caught
thy gaze,

*That thou art fevered with this flameless fire ?

Chrys. Now by the Gods ! I pray thee, list to me,
That thou may'st know if I be sane or mad.

890

Elec. Tell then thy tale, if thou find joy in it.

Chrys. And I will tell each thing of all I saw ;

ELECTRA

For when I came where stands our father's tomb
 Time-honoured,¹ on the summit of the mound
 I see the marks of flowing streams of milk
 New poured, and lo ! my father's bier was crowned
 With garlands of all flowers that deck the fields ;
 And, seeing it, I wondered, and looked round,
 Lest any man should still be hovering near ;
 And when I saw that all the place was calm,
 I went yet nearer to the mound, and there
 I saw upon the topmost point of all
 A tress of hair, fresh severed from the head.
 And when poor I beheld it, in my soul
 A once-familiar image stirs the thought
 That here I saw a token true from him
 Whom most I love, Orestes. In my hands
 I take it, uttering no ill-omened cries,
 But straight mine eyes were filled with tears of joy ;
 And then and now I know with equal faith
 This precious gift can come from none but him ;
 Whose task is this but either mine or thine ?
 And I, I know, have had no hand in it,
 Nor yet hast thou ; how else, when thou 'rt forbid
 E'en to the Gods to go from 'neath this roof
 Except at cost of tears ? Nor does her heart,
 Our mother's, love to do such things as these ;
 Nor could she, doing it, have 'scaped our view.
 *No ! These tomb-offerings from Orestes come.
 Take courage, sister dear ! The same drear fate
 Stands not for ever to the same men comrade :
 Till now it frowned on us ; but lo ! to-day
 Shall be of countless good the harbinger.

Elec. Ah me ! How much thy madness moves my
 pity !

Chrys. What ! Speak I not a thing that gives thee joy ?

Elec. Thou know'st not where thou art in fact or thought.

1 " Time-honoured " as the sepulchre of the house of Pelops.

ELECTRA

Chrys. How can I not know what I clearly saw ?

Elec. He, thou poor soul, is dead, and with him goes
All hope of safety. Think no more of him.

Chrys. Ah, wretched me ! From whom hast thou
heard this ?

Elec. From one who stood hard by when he was killed.

Chrys. And where is he ? Strange wonder thrills
through me.

Elec. Within, our mother's not unwelcome guest.

Chrys. Ah me ! And yet what man was it that left
These many offerings at my father's grave ? 989

Elec. I for my part must think that some one placed
them

Memorials of Orestes who is dead.

Chrys. Ah me ! I hastened, joyous, with my tale,
Not knowing in what depths of woe we were ;
And now, when I have come, I find at once
My former woes, with fresh ones in their train.

Elec. So stands it with thee. But if thou wilt list
To me, thou shalt cast off this weight of woe.

Chrys. What ! shall I ever bring the dead to life ? 940

Elec. I meant not that : I am not quite so mad.

Chrys. What bidd'st thou, then, that I can answer for ?

Elec. That thou should'st dare to do what I shall bid.

Chrys. Well ! If it profit, I will not refuse.

Elec. See ! without labour nothing prospers well.

Chrys. I see, and I with all my strength will work.

Elec. Hear, then, what I am purposed to perform.

Thou knowest, e'en thou, that we behold no more
The presence of our friends, but Hades dark
Has snatched them, and we twain are left alone. 954

And I, as long as I still heard and deemed
My brother strong and living, still had hopes
That he would come to avenge our father's death ;
But now that he is gone I look to thee,
That thou flinch not, with me thy sister here,

ELECTRA

From slaying him, Ægisthos, whose hand wrought
Our father's murder ; for I may not hide
Aught of my mind from thee. How long, how long
Dost thou wait dully, looking to what hope
As yet remaining, when for thee is nought
But grief, as robbed of all thy father's wealth, 960
And sorrow that thou waxest old till now,
Without or marriage-bed or marriage-song ?
And cherish thou no hope that thou shalt gain
Or this or that. Ægisthos is not blind,
To let our progeny, or mine or thine,
Spring up or grow, to be his certain harm.
But, if thou wilt to my advice give heed,
First, thou shalt gain the praise of reverence due
Both from our father, who now sleeps below,
And from our brother ; next, thou shalt be called, 970
As thou wast born, free, noble, and shalt gain
Befitting marriage. All men love to look
On deeds of goodness. Dost not see full clear
All the fair fame thou 'lt gain for thee and me,
If thou obey my counsels ? Who, seeing us,
Or citizen or stranger, will not greet us
With praises such as these ? " Behold, my friends,
Those sisters twain, who saved their father's house,
And on their foes who walked in pride of strength,
Regardless of their lives, wrought doom of death ! 980
These all must love, these all must reverence ;
These in our feasts, and when the city meets
In full assemblage, all should honour well,
For this their manly prowess." Thus will all
Speak of us, so that fame we shall not miss,
Living or dying. Do but hear me, dear one.
Toil for thy father, for thy brother work,
Free me from all my evils, free thyself,
Knowing this, that living basely is for those
Who have been born of noble stock most base.

ELECTRA

Chor. Forethought at such a crisis is for those
Who speak and those that hear, the best ally.

Chrys. And she, O women, ere she spoke, had kept
(Had she not chanced to be of mind diseased)
That cautious reverence which she keeps not now.

What hast thou seen that thou dost arm thyself
In such foolhardy rashness, and dost call

On me to help thee? Wilt thou never see?

Lo, thou wast born a woman, not a man,
And art less strong than those thine enemies.

And their good fortune prospers every day,
While ours falls off, and doth to nothing come.

Who, plotting to attack a man like that,
Shall pass unscathed, unvexed by bitter woe?

Take heed lest we who fare but badly now
Should fare yet worse, if any hear thy speech;

For nothing does it help or profit us,
Gaining fair fame, a shameful death to die;

[Yet death is not the worst, but when one seeks
To die, and fails e'en that poor gain to win.]

Come, I implore thee, and before thou work
Our utter ruin, and our house lay waste,

Restrain thine anger. What thou now hast said
I will keep secret, and no ill result

From this shall come. But thou, be wise at last,
Powerless thyself, to yield before the strong.

Chor. Yes, hearken thou! No gain that men can reap
Surpasses forethought and wise-counselled mind.

Elec. Thou hast said nought unlooked for. Well I
knew

That thou would'st none of all I urged on thee.

Well! I alone, with my own hands, must do

This deed: for void we will not leave it now.

Chrys. Would thou had'st had this spirit then, when he,
Our father, died! Great things thou then had'st wrought.

Elec. My nature was the same, though weak my mind.

ELECTRA

Chrys. Strive, then, to have such mind for evermore.

Elec. Thou giv'st advice as one who will not help.

Chrys. 'Tis fit that they who do ill, ill should fare.

Elec. I praise thy wit ; thy cowardice I hate.

Chrys. Soon I shall have to hear, while thou dost praise.

Elec. Thou at my hands shalt never suffer that. 1030

Chrys. The long, long future must on this decide.

Elec. Away ! away ! Thou hast no power to help.

Chrys. I have ; but thou hast lost the power to learn.

Elec. Go, then. Tell all to that thy mother there.

Chrys. I do not hate thee with a hate like that.

Elec. Yet think to what a shame thou leadest me.

Chrys. No, 'tis not shame, but forethought for thy good.

Elec. Must I then follow what thou deemest just ?

Chrys. When thou art wise, then thou shalt take the lead.

Elec. 'Tis strange one speaking well should err so greatly.

Chrys. Thou hast said well the ill thou mak'st thine own. 1040

Elec. What ? Seem I not to thee to speak the right ?

Chrys. There is a time when even right may harm.

Elec. I do not choose to live by laws like that.

Chrys. If this thou dost, thou'lt one day give me praise.

Elec. And I will do it, nothing scared by thee.

Chrys. And is it so ? Wilt thou not change thy plans ?

Elec. Not so ; than evil counsel nought is worse.

Chrys. Thou seem'st to care for nought of all I speak.

Elec. Long since I planned it ; 'tis no new device.

Chrys. I then must needs depart ; thou darest not 1050
To praise my words, nor I these moods of thine.

Elec. Go, then, within : I ne'er will follow thee,
No ! not though thou should'st wish it eagerly.

To hunt a shadow is a madman's sport.

Chrys. Nay, then ! If thou dost think thou reasonest well,

ELECTRA

So reason. When thou find'st thyself in grief,
Then thou wilt praise my counsels.

[*Exeunt ELECTRA and CHRYSOTHEMIS.*

STROPHE I

Chor. Why, when we see on high
The birds for wisdom famed¹
Caring to nourish those from whom they spring, 1066
From whom they found support,
Why fail we to requite
Like boon on equal scale?
But, lo! by Zeus' glaring lightning flash,
By Themis throned on high,
Not long shall we escape our chastisement.
Ah, Voice that to the central depths of earth²
Dost bear our human deeds,
Lift up thy wailing speech
To those of Atreus' sons who sleep below,
Telling of foulest shame,
Unmeet for choral song.

ANTISTROPHE I

Long since their house is sick 1070
With sorrow's pain, and now
Their children's strife no more may be appeased
By kindly intercourse.
Electra, left alone,
Sails on a troubled sea,
*Still wailing evermore, with piteous cry,
The father whom she loved,

¹ The "birds for wisdom famed" are here the storks. Building their nests on the roofs of houses, their habits came under men's notice, and they had come to be proverbial as presenting the pattern of filial reverence.

² The feeling that tidings from the world of the living reached the dead in Hades was expressed in the personification of a Voice, Message, Fame, whose dwelling was below the earth, and whose function it was to bear them.

ELECTRA

Like nightingale whose song is fraught with woe,
Nor has she any shrinking fear of death,

Ready to close her eyes

In darkness as of night,

If only she the Erinnys pair¹ destroy.

1080

Who lives there true in soul

To noble stock as she?

STROPHE II

None of the great and good

Would lose his ancient name,

And stain his glory by a wretched life.

So thou, my child, my child, did'st choose the fate,

The fate which all bewail,

*And, having warred with ill,

Did'st gain, in one brief word,

The good report of daughter wise and best.

ANTISTROPHE II

May'st thou, in might and wealth,

Prevail o'er those thy foes,

1090

As much as now thou liv'st beneath their hands;

For I have found thee, not in high estate

Wending thy way, yet still,

In love and fear of Zeus,

Gaining the foremost prize

In all the laws that best and greatest are.

*Enter ORESTES and PYLADES, followed by two or three
Attendants bearing a funeral urn.*

Ores. And did we then, ye women, hear aright?

And do we rightly journey where we wish?

Chor. What dost thou search? And wherefore art
thou come? 1100

Ores. This long time past I seek Ægisthos' home.

¹ The Erinnys pair are, of course, Clytemnestra and Ægisthos, looked on as intensely evil, and yet the instruments of a divine vengeance.

ELECTRA

Chor. Thou comest right, and blameless he who told thee.

Ores. And which of you would tell to those within
The longed-for coming of our company?

Chor. [*Pointing to ELECTRA.*] She, if 'tis fit to call the nearest one.

Ores. Go, then, O maiden, go and tell them there,
That certain men from Phokis seek Ægisthos.

Elec. Ah, wretched me! It cannot be ye bring
Clear proofs of that dire rumour which we heard?

Ores. I know not of thy rumour; Strophios old 1110
Charged me to bring the news about Orestes.

Elec. What is it, stranger? Fear creeps through my veins.

Ores. We bring, as thou dost see, in one small urn,
All that is left, poor relics of the dead.

Elec. Ah, me! And this is it! 'Twould seem I gaze
On that same burden, clear and close at hand.

Ores. If thou dost weep Orestes' hapless fate,
Know that this urn doth all his body hold.

Elec. Ah, stranger! Now by all the Gods, I pray,
If this urn hold him, give it in mine hands, 1120
That I my fate and that of all my kin
May wail and weep with these poor ashes here.

Ores. [*To his Attendants.*] Bring it, and give it her,
whoe'er she be:

At least she does not ask it as in hate,
But is perchance a friend, or near in blood.

Elec. [*Taking the urn in her hands.*] O sole memorial
of his life whom most

Of all alive I loved! Orestes mine,
With other thoughts I sent thee forth than these
With which I now receive thee. Now, I bear
In these my hands what is but nothingness;
But sent thee forth, dear boy, in bloom of youth. 1130
Ah, would that I long since had ceased to live

ELECTRA

Before I sent thee to a distant shore,
 With these my hands, and saved thee then from death!
 So had'st thou perished on that self-same day,
 And had a share in that thy father's tomb.
 But now from home, an exile in a land
 That was not thine, without thy sister near,
 So did'st thou die, and I, alas, poor me!
 Did neither lay thee out with lustral rites
 And loving hands, nor bear thee, as was meet,
 Sad burden, from the blazing funeral pyre ;
 But thou, poor sufferer, tended by the hands
 Of strangers, comest, in this paltry urn,
 In paltry bulk. Ah, miserable me!
 For all the nurture, now so profitless,
 Which I was wont with sweetest toil to give
 For thee, my brother. Never did she love,
 Thy mother, as I loved thee ; nor did they
 Who dwell within there nurse thee, but 'twas I,
 And I was ever called thy sister true ;
 But now all this has vanished in a day
 In this thy death ; for, like a whirlwind, thou
 Hast passed, and swept off all. My father falls ;
 I perish ; thou thyself hast gone from sight ;
 Our foes exult. My mother, wrongly named,
 For mother she is none, is mad with joy,
 Of whom thou oft did'st send word secretly
 That thou would'st come and one day show thyself
 A true avenger. But thine evil fate,
 Thine and mine also, hath bereaved me of thee,
 And now hath sent, instead of that dear form,
 This dust, this shadow, vain and profitless.

1140

1150

1160

Woe, woe is me!
 O piteous, piteous corpse!
 Thou dearest, who did'st tread,
 (Woe, woe is me!)
 Paths full of dread and fear,

ELECTRA

How hast thou brought me low,
Yea, brought me very low, thou dearest one!
Therefore receive thou me to this thine home,
Ashes to ashes, that with thee below
I may from henceforth dwell. When thou wast here
I shared with thee an equal lot, and now
I crave in dying not to miss thy tomb ;
For those that die I see are freed of grief. 1170

Chor. Thou, O Electra, take good heed, wast born
Of mortal father, mortal, too, Orestes ;
Yield not too much to grief. To suffer thus
Is common lot of all.

Ores. [*Trembling.*] Ah, woe is me !
What shall I say? Ah, whither find my way
In words confused? I fail to rule my speech.

Elec. What grief disturbs thee? Wherefore speak'st
thou thus?

Ores. Is this Electra's noble form I see?

Elec. That self-same form, and sad enough its state.

Ores. Alas, alas, for this sad lot of thine !

Elec. Surely thou dost not wail, O friend, for me? 1180

Ores. O form most basely, godlessly misused !

Elec. Thy words ill-omened fall on none but me.

Ores. Alas, for this thy life of lonely woe !

Elec. Why, in thy care for me, friend, groanest thou ?

Ores. How little knew I of my fortune's ills !

Elec. What have I said to throw such light on them ?

Ores. Now that I see thee clad with many woes.

Elec. And yet thou see'st but few of all mine ills.

Ores. What could be sadder than all this to see ?

Elec. This, that I sit at meat with murderers. 1190

Ores. With whose? What evil dost thou mean by this ?

Elec. My father's ; next, I'm forced to be their slave.

Ores. And who constrains thee to this loathed task ?

Elec. My mother she is called, no mother like.

Ores. How so? By blows, or life with hardships full ?

ELECTRA

Elec. Both blows and hardships, and all forms of ill.

Ores. And is there none to help, not one to check?

Elec. No, none. Who was . . . thou bringest him as dust.

Ores. O sad one! Long I pitied as I gazed!

Elec. Know, then, that thou alone dost pity me. 1200

Ores. For I alone come suffering woes like thine.

Elec. What? Can it be thou art of kin to us?

Ores. If these are friendly, I could tell thee more.

Elec. Friendly are they; thou'lt speak to faithful ones.

Ores. Put by that urn, that thou may'st hear the whole.

Elec. Ah, by the Gods, O stranger, ask not that.

Ores. Do what I bid thee, and thou shalt not err.

Elec. Nay, by thy beard, of that prize rob me not.

Ores. I may not have it so.

Elec. Ah me, Orestes, 1210

How wretched I, bereaved of this thy tomb!

Ores. Hush, hush such words: thou hast no cause for wailing.

Elec. Have I no cause, who mourn a brother's death?

Ores. Thou hast no call to utter speech like this.

Elec. Am I then deemed unworthy of the dead?

Ores. Of none unworthy. This is nought to thee.

Elec. Yet if I hold Orestes' body here.

Ores. 'Tis not Orestes' save in show of speech.

Elec. Where, then, is that poor exile's sepulchre?

Ores. Nay, of the living there's no sepulchre.

Elec. What say'st thou, boy? 1220

Ores. No falsehood what I say.

Elec. And does he live?

Ores. He lives, if I have life.

Elec. What? Art thou he?

Ores. Look thou upon this seal,

My father's once, and learn if I speak truth.

Elec. O blessed light!

Ores. Most blessed, I too own.

ELECTRA

Elec. O voice! And art thou come?

Ores. No longer learn

Thy news from others.

Elec. And I have thee here,

Here in my grasp?

Ores. So may'st thou always have me!

Elec. O dearest friends, my fellow-citizens,
Look here on this Orestes, dead indeed
In feignèd craft, and by that feigning saved.

Chor. We see it, daughter; and at what has chanced
A tear of gladness trickles from our eyes. [1230]

Elec. O offspring, offspring of a form most dear,
Ye came, ye came at last,
Ye found us, yea, ye came,
Ye saw whom ye desired.

Ores. Yes, we are come. Yet wait and hold thy peace.

Elec. What now?

Ores. Silence is best, lest some one hear within.

Elec. Nay, nay. By Artemis,
The ever-virgin One,
I shall not deign to dread
Those women there within,
With worthless burden still
Cumbering the ground.

1240

Ores. See to it, for in women too there lives
The strength of battle. Thou hast proved it well.

Elec. [Sobbing.] Ah, ah! Ah me!
There thou hast touched upon a woe unveiled,
That knows no healing, no,
Nor ever may be hid.

1250

Ores. I know it well. But, when occasion bids,
Then should we call those deeds to memory.

Elec. All time for me is fit,
Yea, all, to speak of this,
With wrath as it deserves;
Till now I had scant liberty of speech.

ELECTRA

Ores. There we are one. Preserve, then, what thou hast.

Elec. And what, then, shall I do ?

Ores. When time serves not,
Speak not o'ermuch.

Elec. And who then worthily, 1260

Now thou art come, would choose

Silence instead of speech ?

For lo ! I see thee now unlooked, unhop'd for.

Ores. Then thou did'st see me here,
When the Gods urg'd my coming.

Elec. Thou hast said
What mounts yet higher than thy former boon,

If God has sent thee forth

To this our home ; I deem 1270

The work as Heaven's own deed.

Ores. Loth am I to restrain thee in thy joy,
And yet I fear delight o'ermasters thee.

Elec. O thou who after many a weary year

At last hast deigned to come,

(Oh, coming of great joy !)

Do not, thus seeing me

Involved in many woes,

Ores. What is it that thou ask'st me not to do ?

Elec. Deprive me not, nor force me to forego
The joy supreme of looking on thy face.

Ores. I should be wroth with others who would force
thee.

Elec. Dost thou consent, then ?

Ores. How act otherwise ?

Elec. Ah, friends, I heard a voice [1280
Which never had I dreamt would come to me ;
Then I kept in my dumb and passionate mood,
Nor cried I, as I heard ;

But now I have thee ; thou hast come to me
With face most precious, dear to look upon,
Which e'en in sorrow I can ne'er forget.

ELECTRA

Ores. All needless words pass over. Tell me not
My mother's shame, nor how Ægisthos drains 1290
My father's wealth, much wastes, and scatters much;
Much speech might lose occasion's golden hour;
But what fits in to this our present need,
That tell me, where, appearing or concealed,
We best shall check our boasting enemies,
In this our enterprise; so when we twain
Go to the palace, look to it, that she note not,
Thy mother, by thy blither face, our coming,
But mourn as for that sorrow falsely told.
When we have prospered, then shalt thou have leave
Freely to smile, and joy exultingly. 1300

Elec. Yes, brother dear! Whatever pleaseth thee,
That shall be my choice also, since my joy
I had not of mine own, but gained from thee,
Nor would I cause thee e'en a moment's pain,
Myself to reap much profit. I should fail,
So doing, to work His will who favours us.
What meets us next, thou knowest, dost thou not?
Ægisthos, as thou hearest, gone from home;
My mother there within, of whom fear not
Lest she should see my face look blithe with joy; 1310
For my old hatred eats into my soul,
And, since I've seen thee, I shall never cease
To weep for very joy. How could I cease,
Who in this one short visit looked on thee
Dead, and alive again? Strange things to-day
Hast thou wrought out, so strange that should there come
My father, in full life, I should not deem
'Twas a mere marvel, but believe I saw him.
But, since thou com'st on such an enterprise,
Rule thou as pleases thee. Were I alone,
I had not failed of two alternatives,
Or nobly had I saved myself, or else 1320
Had nobly perished.

ELECTRA

Ores. Silence now is best;
I hear the steps of some one from within,
As if approaching.

Enter Attendant of ORESTES from the palace.

Elec. [*Aloud.*] Enter in, my friends,
On many grounds, and chiefly that ye bring,
What none will send away, yet none receive
With any touch of pleasure.

Attend. O ye fools.
And blind, bereaved of counsel, care ye now
No longer for your lives? or is there not
Your mother-wit still with you? Know ye not
Ye stand—I say not on the very verge,
But in the ills—the greatest ills themselves? 1330
Had I not chanced long since to keep my watch
Just at the gate, your doings had been known
There, in the house, before your forms were seen.
But, as it is, I guarded against this;
And now, set free from all this flood of talk,
Free from this girl's insatiate burst of joy,
Go ye within. In such a deed delay
Is evil, and 'tis time to end with it.

Ores. How stand things there for me to go within?

Attend. Right well! for none is found who knows thee
there. 1340

Ores. 'Twould seem that thou hast told of me as dead.

Attend. Know thou art here as one to Hades gone.

Ores. Do they rejoice in this? What words were said?

Attend. When all is o'er, I'll tell thee. As it is,
All is well with them, even what is ill.

Elec. Who is this, brother? Tell me, by the Gods.

Ores. Dost thou not know?

Elec. I call him not to mind.

Ores. Know'st thou not him whose hands thou gav'st
me to?

ELECTRA

Elec. To whom? What say'st thou?

Ores. Even he, who brought me,
Through thy wise forethought, to the Phokian plain. 1350

Elec. What? Is this he, whom only, out of many,
I faithful found when they our father slew?

Ores. 'Tis he: waste no more words in questioning.

Elec. O blessed light, O thou preserver sole
Of Agamemnon's house, how cam'st thou here?
And art thou he who then did rescue him
And me from many sorrows? O dear hands,
And thou that did'st thy feet's glad ministry,
How was it that so long thou stayed'st with me,
And yet did'st 'scape my ken, did'st not appear,
But did'st in words destroy me, bringing acts 1360
Most full of joy? Hail, O my father, hail,
(For sure, I think I see a father's face,)
Hail, once again, and know that this one day
Above all men I hated thee and loved.

Attend. This is enough, methinks. What lies between
Full many a day and many a circling night
Shall show thee plain, Electra. But you twain,
There standing by, I call to act, for now
The time is come. Now Clytemnestra sits
Alone. Now no man is within. Think well,
If ye hold back, that ye will have to fight
With these and others craftier far than they. 1370

Ores. No longer is it time for lengthened speech,
My Pylades, but with swift foot to press
Within, when first we have adored the shrines
Of all the ancestral Gods who guard these gates.

[*Exeunt ORESTES and PYLADES into the palace.*]

Elec. O King Apollo, hear them graciously,
And hear me also, who of what I had
Have stood before thee with a liberal hand;
And now Lykeian king, Apollo, hear;
With all I have I kneel, pray, supplicate;

ELECTRA

Be Thou the gracious helper of our plans,
And show to all men how the Gods bestow
Their due rewards on all impiety.

1880

[*Exit.*

STROPHE I

Chor. See ye, where Ares, breathing slaughter still,
Speeds on his onward way,
Slaughter that none may check ;
E'en at this very hour, beneath the roof,
They go who track all evil deeds of guile,
The hounds whom none escape ;
And lo ! my soul's dream doth not tarry long
Floating in wild suspense ;

1890

ANTISTROPHE

For now beneath the roof-tree he has passed,
The avenger of the dead,
Treading with subtle feet,
E'en to his father's high ancestral halls,
And in his hands bears slaughter newly edged ;
And Hermes, Maia's son,
Hiding their counsel, leads them to the goal,
Leads on, and tarries not.

Enter ELECTRA from the palace.

Elec. Now, dearest friends, the men stand there within,
And do their deed. But hush : in silence wait.

Chor. How is't ? What do they ?

Elec. She prepares an urn 1400

For sepulture, and those two stand hard by.

Chor. Why did'st thou rush without ?

Elec. To stand on guard,

That so Ægisthos, if he home return,

May not escape our notice.

Glytem. [*Within.*] Woe ! oh, woe !

O house bereaved of friends,

And full of them that slay !

ELECTRA

Elec. A cry goes up within ; friends, hear ye not ?

Chor. I heard what none should hear, ah misery !
And shuddered listening.

Clytem. [*Within.*] Ah me ! Ah me ! Woe, Woe !
Ægisthos, where art thou ?

Elec. Ha ! List again,
I hear a bitter cry.

1410

Clytem. [*Within.*] My son, my son,
Have pity on thy mother !

Elec. Thou had'st none
On him, nor on the father that begat him.

Chor. O land ! O miserable race ! Thy doom
Each day is "perish, perish utterly."

Clytem. [*Within.*] Ah ! I am smitten.

Elec. Smite her yet again,
If thou hast strength for it.

Clytem. [*Within.*] Ah ! Blow on blow !

Elec. Would that *Ægisthos* shared them.

Chor. Yes. The curse
Is now fulfilled. The buried live again ;
For they who died long since now drain in turn
The blood of those that slew them.

1420

Enter ORESTES and PYLADES.

See ! They come ;
And lo ! their crimsoned hands drip drops of gore
*Poured out to Ares ; and I dare not blame.

Elec. How fare ye now, *Orestes* ?

Ores. All within
Is well, if well *Apollo* prophesied.

Elec. And is she dead, vile wretch ?

Ores. Yes. Fear thou not
Thy mother's mood shall e'er shame thee again.

Chor. Hush ! for I see *Ægisthos* full in sight.

1430

Elec. Back, back, ye boys !

[*Thrusts ORESTES and PYLADES behind the scene.*

ELECTRA

Ores. [*As he goes.*] And see ye where this man?

Elec. He from the suburbs comes upon us now,
Rejoicing.

Chor. Go, full speed, behind the doors,
That ye, one work well done, may yet again

Ores. Take courage, we will act

Elec. Now speed thy plans. [*Pushing him off.*]

Ores. I then am gone. [*Exeunt ORESTES and PYLADES.*]

Elec. What meets us next is mine.

Chor. 'Twere good to speak to this man in his ear
But few words, very gently, that he rush
Into the hidden struggle of his doom. 1440

Enter ÆGISTHOS.

Ægis. Who knows of you where they, from Phokis
come,
May now be found, who bring, they tell me, news
That our Orestes has breathed out his last,
In wreck of chariot storm? Thee, [*To ELECTRA,*] thee,
I ask—

Yes, thee, still wont to be of old so brave.
As I suppose it touches thee the most,
So thou, knowing most, may'st tell me what I seek.

Elec. I know. How else? Could I then stand aloof
From that dear chance of those who most are mine?

Ægis. Where are the strangers, then? Tell this to
me. 1450

Elec. Within; for they have found a loving hostess.

Ægis. And did they say distinctly he was dead?

Elec. Ah no! They showed him, not in words alone.

Ægis. And is he here, that we may see him plain?

Elec. 'Tis here, a most unwelcome sight to see.

Ægis. Against thy wont thou giv'st me joy indeed.

Elec. Thou may'st rejoice, if this be ground of joy.

Ægis. I bid you hush, and open wide the gates,
That all of Argos and Mykenæ see.

ELECTRA

So, if there be that once were lifted up,
With hopes they had, vain hopes they fixed on him, 1460
Now seeing him dead, they may receive my curb,
And, finding me their master, sense may gain,
Without coercion.

Elec Yea, my task indeed
Is done ; for I at last have wisdom gained,
To work with those more mighty.

[The doors are thrown open, and disclose
ORESTES and PYLADES standing by the
dead body of CLYTEMNESTRA, covered with
a sheet and a veil over the face.]

Ægis. Lo, I see,
O Zeus, a form that lies there, fallen low,
Not without wrath of Heaven (should that word stir
Heaven's jealousy, I wish it all unsaid).

Withdraw the veil which hides the face, that I
To kindred blood may pay the meed of tears.

Ores. Do thou uplift it. 'Tis thy task, not mine, 1470
To look on this, and kindly words to speak.

Ægis. Thou giv'st good counsel, and I list to thee :
And thou, if yet she tarries in the house,
Call Clytemnestra.

Ores. [*As ÆGISTHOS lifts the veil.*] Here she lies
before thee!
Seek her not elsewhere.

Ægis. Oh, what sight is this!

Ores. Whom fearest thou? Who is 't thou dost not know?

Ægis. Into whose snares, whose closely-tangled mesh,
Have I, poor victim, fallen?

Ores. See'st not yet
That thou did'st greet the living as the dead?

Ægis. Ah me! I catch thy words. It needs must
be

This is Orestes who now speaks to me.

ELECTRA

Ores. Wert thou then tricked, who dost divine so well?

Ægis. I then am lost, woe's me! yet let me speak One little word.

Elec. Give him no leave to speak,
By all the Gods, my brother, nor to spin
His long discourse. When men are plunged in
ills,

What gain can one who stands condemned to die
Reap from delay? No, slay him out of hand,
And, having slain him, cast him forth, to find
Fit burial at their hands from whom 'tis meet
That he should have it, far away from view.
Thus only shall I gain a remedy
For all the evils of the years gone by.

1490

Ores. [*To ÆGISTHOS.*] Go thou within, and quickly.
Now our strife
Is not of words, but for thy life itself.

Ægis. Why dost thou force me in? If this be
right,
What need of darkness? Why not slay at once?

Ores. Give thou no orders, but where thou did'st
slay
My father, go, that thou too there may'st die.

Ægis. Is it then doomed this house should see the
ills
Of Pelops' line, both present and to come?

Ores. Yes, thine: of that, at least, I 'm prophet
true.

Ægis. The skill thou boastest came not from thy
sire.

Ores. Still thou dost bandy many idle words, [1500]
And length'nest out the way. Move on.

Ægis. Lead thou.

Ores. Not so. Thou must go first.

Ægis. Dost think I 'll flee?

ELECTRA

Ores. Thou must not die the death thou would'st
 desire ;

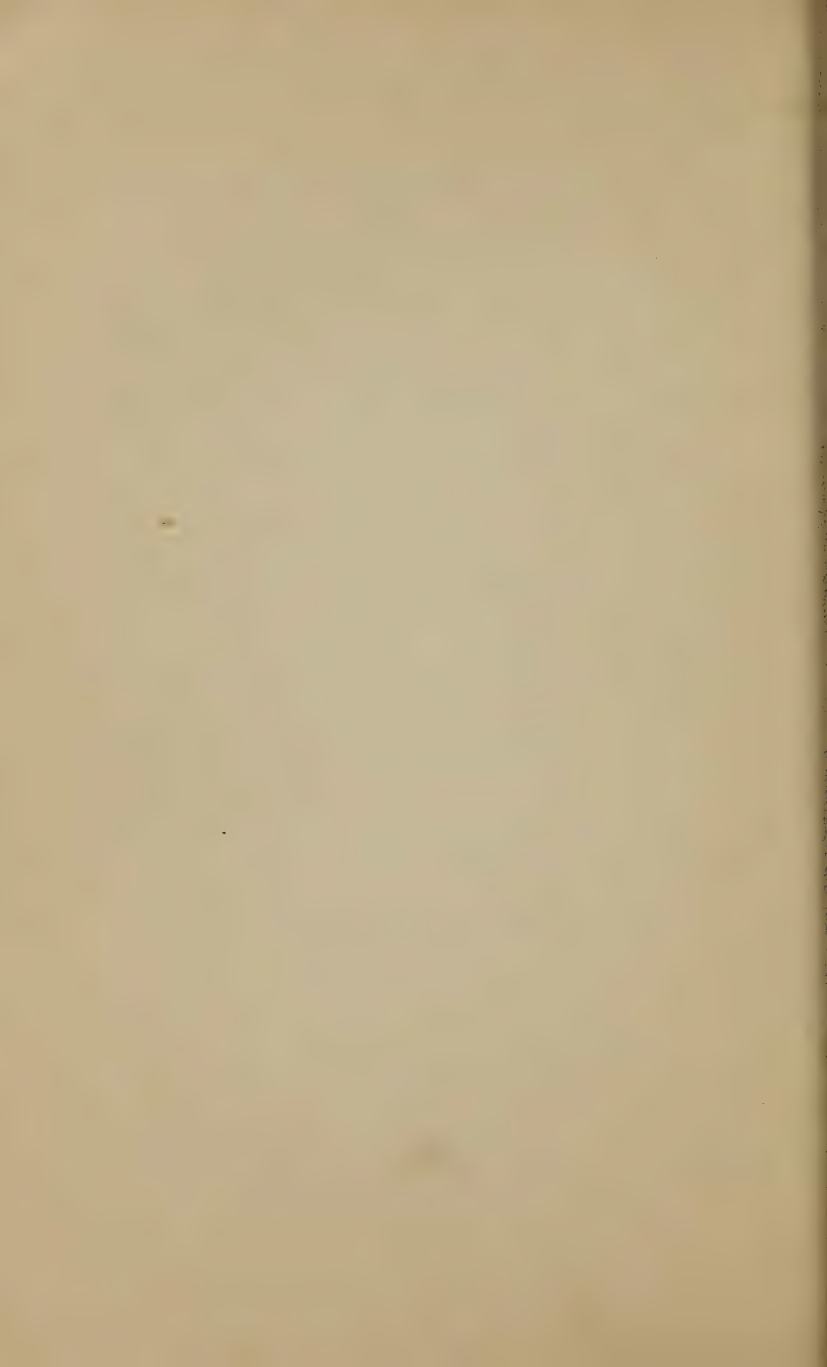
I needs must make it bitter. Doom like this
Should fall on all who dare transgress the laws,
The doom of death. Then wickedness no more
Would multiply its strength.

Chor. O seed of Atreus, after many woes,
Thou hast come forth, thy freedom hardly won,
By this emprise made perfect !

1510

END OF PART I.





SOPHOCLES



Hedley Fiddon, pinx

COLONOS.

SOPHOCLES

TRAGEDIES
AND
FRAGMENTS

Translated by the late
E. H. PLUMPTRE D.D.
Dean of Wells

WITH NOTES RHYMED
CHORAL ODES AND
LYRICAL DIALOGUES

IN TWO VOLUMES
VOL II

BOSTON U.S.A.

D. C. HEATH & CO., PUBLISHERS

1914

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Hedley Fitton

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THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

HERACLES.

Elder.

HYLLOS, son of HERACLES.

DEIANEIRA, wife of HERACLES.

LICHAS, a herald.

Attendant.

Messenger.

IOLE, a captive maiden.

Nurse.

Chorus of Trachinian Maidens.

ARGUMENT.—Æneus, king of Pleuron in Ætolia, had a fair daughter, Deianeira, and many sought her in marriage, chiefly the river god Acheloös, whom she dreaded even to look upon. And Heracles came, and conquered the river god, and took Deianeira as his bride. And as they journeyed to Tiryns, they passed the stream Euenos, where Nessos the Kentaur was wont to carry travellers across. And as he bore Deianeira, he laid rude hands on her, and Heracles, seeing this, shot him with an arrow, that had been dipped in the venom of the Lernæan hydra; and Nessos, as he died, gave a rag, dipped in the blood of his wound, to Deianeira, and told her that it would be a love-charm to win back her husband's heart, should he ever prove unfaithful. And they lived together, and she bore him Hyllos and other children; and, though Heracles was light of love, yet she never used the charm, but kept her soul in patience.

And for many years Heracles went to and fro, fulfilling the labours which Eurystheus laid upon him, and, when these were over, being sore vexed, in his rage he slew Iphitos, the son of Eurytos, king of Æchalia, who had provoked him,

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

and for this Zeus sentenced him to serve Omphale for a whole year in Lydia. And Deianeira fled from Tiryns, for fear of Eurystheus, and abode at Trachis. Now when the year of bondage to Omphale was over, Heracles, being in love with Iole, daughter of Eurytos, invaded her father's kingdom, and laid it waste, and sent Iole and other captive women to Tiryns, while he stayed to offer sacrifice to Zeus after his victory. And all this time Deianeira remained at home in much fear and trembling.

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

SCENE—TRACHIS, in the courtyard of DEIANEIRA's house.

Enter DEIANEIRA, Attendant, and Chorus of Trachinian Maidens.

Deian. 'Tis an old saying, told of many men,
"Thou canst not judge man's life before he die,
Nor whether it be good or bad for him;"¹
But I, before I tread the paths of death,
Know that my life is dark and full of woe,
Who, dwelling in my father CENEUS' house,
At Pleuron, had, of all Ætolian maids,
Most cause to shrink from marriage; for my hand
The river Acheloös came to seek,
In triple form my father suing for me;
At one time as a bull in bodily form,
Then as a dragon wound his speckled length,
And then with human trunk and head of ox,
And from his shaggy beard there flowed the streams
Of his clear fountains.² Such a suitor I,
Receiving sadly, wished that I might die

10

¹ The proverb itself, like most maxims of the same kind, came to be associated with a conspicuous name, and appears in Herodotos as the great lesson which Solon tried to impress on the mind of Cræsos.

² It may be worth while to note the analogies which suggested the symbolic forms. In the strength of the river, and the sound of its many waters, men found what reminded them of the bull. As they saw its windings through the plain, it seemed like a great serpent. The figure of the human form, with the head of an ox, embodied the feeling that the river seemed to wind "as its own sweet will."

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Ere I approached his bed. And then there came,
Later, indeed, yet much beloved by me,
Zeus' noble son, whom fair Alcmena bore,
Who, wrestling with him in the strife of war, 20
Wrought out my rescue. What the mode of fight
I tell not, for I know not. He might tell
Whoe'er could gaze unshrinking at the sight;
For I was there, struck down with panic-fear
[Lest all my beauty should but bring me woe ;]
But Zeus, the God of battles, gave to us
Good issue, if in truth it be but good ;
For, sharing now the bed of Heracles
By special grace, I cherish fear on fear,
Still pining for him. Night brings woe with it,
*And if it bids it go, night but receives
Fresh trouble still. Yea ! sons were born to us ; 30
And like a husbandman who tills the soil
Of distant field, and sees the crop but once,
Sowing and reaping, so is he to them ;
Such course of life still sends my husband home,
And far from home, in servile labour bound
To one we know. And now when he has reached
The goal of all these labours, most of all
I sit and shudder. Since he smote the might
Of Iphitos, we here in Trachis dwell
Far from our land, and with a stranger host ;
And where he is, none knows. But he has left 40
In this his flight full bitter pangs for me,
And half I know he bears some weight of woe,
For no short time is passed, but ten long months
Added to five, and still no message comes.
And some sore woe comes on ; for so it tells,
The tablet which he left us, and I pray
The Gods that gift may not bring woe to me.

Attend. My mistress, Deianeira, I have seen thee
Bewailing oft, with loud and bitter wails, 50

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

The absence of thy Heracles ; but now,
(If it be right with bond-slave's thoughts to school
Those that are free, and I must speak for thee),—
How comes it thou art rich in many sons,
Yet sendest none to track thy husband's steps ?
Not even Hyllos, whom 'twere fit to send,
If he care aught about his father's fate,
To find it prospering. And lo ! he comes,
Just at the moment, speeding by the house.
So, if I seem to give thee counsel good,
Thou may'st at once make use of him and it.

60

Enter HYLLOS.

Deian. My son, dear boy, good words of counsel fall
E'en from the meanest. Lo ! this woman speaks,
Slave though she be, a free and noble speech.

Hyllos. What was it, mother ? Tell me, if thou may'st.

Deian. That not to seek where now thy father dwells,
After such length of absence, brings thee shame.

Hyllos. Yet if one trust to rumours, I know well.

Deian. And where dost hear, my son, that he abides ?

Hyllos. Long while, from seed-time unto seed-time
round,

They say he served a Lydian lady's will.¹

70

Deian. Could he do that, one might hear anything.

Hyllos. But, so I hear, from this he has escaped.

Deian. Where now, or dead or living, tell they of him ?

Hyllos. 'Tis said that he makes war, or plans to make,
On some Eubœan town of Eurytos'.

Deian. And dost thou know, my son, that he has left
With me true oracles of that same land ?

Hyllos. What were they, mother ? I know nought of
them.

Deian. This, or that he shall find the end of life,

¹ The characteristic effeminacy of the Lydian men made bondage
to a Lydian woman the extremest degradation.

THE MAIDENS OF IRACHIS

Or having this his task accomplished,
Shall, through the coming years of all his life,
Rejoice and prosper. When the scales thus hang,
Wilt thou not go, my child, to give thy help,
*When either we a great deliverance gain,
*Or, if he perish, perish too with him?

Hyllos. Yes, I will go, my mother. Had I known
The utterance of these oracles, long since
I had been there. And, now that I have heard,
I will not fail in aught to learn the truth,
The whole truth, of these matters. Yet the fate
Which waits upon my father gives no cause
For hasty dread and over-anxious care.

Deian. Go then, my son. To hear he prospers well,
Though one hear late, brings balance large of gain.
[Exit HYLLOS.]

STROPHE I

Chor. Thee, whom the Night, star-spangled, bringeth
forth,
Smitten and spoiled by thee,
Whom, in thy strength of fire,
She lulls to calmest couch,¹
On thee I call, our sun-god, Helios,
Tell this, where now he dwells,
Alcmena's noble son, (Thou ever bright,
In sheen of glory clad ;)
Or in the sea's deep glades,
Or taking rest in either continent ?²
Tell this, O Lord, whose eye
Sees with surpassing might.

¹ The words embody the old *mythos* that the sun each night lay down to rest in a winged boat in the far West, and that the boat bore him over the great ocean till he appeared once again in the East.

² In the earliest Greek geography the earth was divided into two continents only, Africa—of which but little was known—being grouped now with Europe and now with Asia.

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

ANTISTROPHE I

For, lo ! I hear that Deianeira still,
Once wooed in many a strife,
Now like a wailing bird,
With sad and sore-vexed heart,
Can never lull to rest the strong desire
Of eyes undimmed with tears,
But ever nurses unforgetting dread
As to her husband's paths,
And wastes her life in anxious, widowed couch, 110
Still looking, in her woe,
For doom of coming ill ;

STROPHE II

For as one sees, when North or South wind blows
In strength invincible,
Full many a wave upon the ocean wide,
Sweeping and rushing on,
So like a Cretan sea,
The stormy grief of life
Now bringeth low the son of Cadmos old,¹
Now lifts him up again ;
Yet some one of the Gods
Still keeps him from the house of Hades dark, 120
As one who may not fail.

ANTISTROPHE II

Wherefore, half blaming thee, I speak my words,
Kindly, yet thwarting thee,
And say thou should'st not fret away good hope ;
Not even He, who reigns in glory crowned,
The son of Cronos high,
Hath given to men a painless heritage,
*But still the whirling courses of the Bear
Bring grief and joy in turn. 130

¹ Heracles, as being of Thebes, is described as the son of the mythical founder of the city.

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

EPODE

For neither does the spangled night remain,
Nor the dark Fates, nor wealth, abide with men ;
Quickly they leave this man, and pass to that,
Both joy, and loss of joy ;
And this, I say that thou, our queen, should'st have
For ever in thy hopes.

For who hath known in Zeus forgetfulness
Of those He children calls ?

140

Deian. Thou comest, one may guess, as having learnt
My many woes : yet may'st thou never know,
(As now thou knowest not,) by suffering taught,
How I consume my soul. The tender plant
Grows in such climes where neither God's hot sun,
Nor storm, nor any blast may trouble it,
But in pure joy it lives its painless life,
Until that hour when maiden gains the name
Of wife, and gains her share of nightly grief,
Or caring for her husband, or her babes.
Then might one see, by that experience taught,
How I am crushed with sorrows. Many a woe
Have I wept bitter tears for. Now of one
I'll tell thee, which I never knew before ;
For when our king, our Heracles, went forth
From home for his last journey, then with me
He leaves a tablet, old, and written o'er
With special rules, which never until then
Had he the heart to tell me, though he went
On many a labour, but still started forth,
As one about to prosper, not to die.
But now, like one as good as dead he told
What chattels I should take as marriage dower,
What shares of all their father's land he gave
In portions to his sons,¹ and fixed a time

150

160

¹ The division connects itself with the *mythos* of the return of the Heracleidæ to claim the whole Peloponnesos as their inheritance.

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

That when for one whole year and three months more
He from this land was absent, then 'twas his,
Or in that self-same hour to die, or else,
Escaping that one crisis, thenceforth live
With life unvexed. Such things, he said, stood firm ¹⁷⁰
By doom of Gods, and thus the end would come
Of all the labours wrought by Heracles ;
For so, he said, Dodona's¹ ancient oak
Had spoken by the voice of twin-born doves.
And of these things the unerring truth is come,
This very hour, as fate decreed it should ;
And so, my friends, while sleeping sweetest sleep,
I start in fear and terror, lest I live
Bereaved of him, the noblest man of all.

Chor. Hush such ill-omened words ; for, lo ! I see
One coming crowned, as if for joyful news.

Enter Messenger, his head crowned with laurel.

Mess. My mistress, Deianeira, first of all ¹⁸⁰
That come as couriers, I will free thy soul
From every fear. Know then, Alcmena's son
Is living, and, victorious in the fight,
Brings his first-fruits unto his country's Gods.

Deian. What news is this, old man, thou bring'st to
me ?

Mess. That he, thy husband, praised of many men,
Will soon appear in strength of victory.

Deian. What townsman, or what stranger, told thee
this ?

Mess. In the wide meadow where the oxen graze,

¹ The oracles at Dodona, given by the Pelasgic Zeus in the land of the Thesprotians, were uttered from a grove of oaks. At first the Selli were the interpreters, then three aged priestesses. Then grew up the *mythos* (rising partly from a play on words) that two doves had flown from Egyptian Thebes, and that one of them flew to the oracle at Dodona, the other to that of Ammon in the Libyan oasis.

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Lichas the herald tells it to the crowd,
And I, thus hearing him, rushed forth at once,
That I might be the first to tell it thee,
Gain some fair guerdon, and thy favour win.

190

Deian. If all goes well, why comes he not himself?

Mess. But little ease is there for him, O lady;
For all the Melian people stand around,
With eager quest, nor has he power to move,
For each one seeks to learn the uttermost,
And will not slack his craving till he hear
His heart's desire. Thus he, against his will,
With them, to meet their will, abides a while;
But thou shalt see him stand before thee soon.

Deian. O Zeus, who rulest Æta's unmown mead,¹
Though tardily, thou giv'st us fullest joy.
Shout, O ye maidens, shout, beneath the roof,
And ye beyond the courtyard, for we gain
From this report a light of rising dawn
We had not dared to hope for.

204

Chor. Let all within exult,
That wait their wedded joy,
With shouts on altar-hearth;
And with them let the stronger voice of men
Proclaim thy name, Apollo, guardian God,
Lord of the quiver bright,
And ye, O maidens, Pæan, Pæan raise;

214

Shout out his Sister's name,
Ortygian² Artemis,
Who smites the fawn, torch-armed in either hand,
With all the neighbouring Nymphs.
I spring aloft, I can no more withstand
The flute's clear voice, O sovereign of my soul.
Behold, it stirs and works,

¹ Meadows consecrated to the Gods were never ploughed or mown.

² The epithet was, in the first instance, applied to Artemis in her temple at Chalkis in Ætolia.

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Evoi ! Oh, Evoi !

The ivy-wreath that leads me back again
To hottest strife of Bacchic revelry.

230

Io ! Oh, Io !

Pæan ! Oh, Pæan !

Look thou, dear lady, look ;
Before thy face they come,
And thou may'st see them clear.

*Enter LICHAS, followed by IOLE and a company of
Captive Women.*

Deian. I see it, O my friends, nor does it 'scape
Mine eye's keen watch that I should fail to note
This proud array. I welcome thee, O herald,
Though thou com'st late, if thou bring'st welcome news.

Lichas. Well are we come, and we are greeted well,
For what we gain in act. It needs must be
That one who prospers should receive good words.

230

Deian. Ah ! dearest friend, first tell me what I first
Desire to know. Come Heracles alive ?

Lichas. I, for my part, left him in strength of health,
Living and well, unsmitten of disease.

Deian. And where ? At home, or on a foreign soil ?

Lichas. There is a high Eubæan promontory
Where he now marks his altars' limits out,
His first-fruits offering to Kenæan Zeus.¹

Deian. Fulfilling vows, or led by oracles ?

Lichas. The vows he made when with his spear he
sacked

240

The city of these women whom thou see'st.

Deian. And these, in Heaven's name, who and whence
are they ?

- The promontory itself was named Kenæon, and there men
pointed to the temple of Zeus at the summit, and the tomb of Lichas.
What is described is not merely the act of sacrifice, but the con-
secration of the ground for ever, as the fruits of his conquest of the
lands.

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Full sad, unless they cheat me with their grief.

Lichas. These, when he sacked the town of Eurytos,
He chose his own possession and the Gods'.

Deian. And was it against that city that he went,
That endless time of days innumerable ?

Lichas. Not so. By far the longest time he spent
In Lydia ; not, so says he, of free choice,
But sold as slave. Let not my tale, dear lady, 250
Move thee to wrath, when Zeus himself appears
The doer of the deed. And he, being sold¹
To Omphale, the alien, so he said,
Served one whole year, And thus, his soul being vexed
At this reproach, he vowed a bitter vow
That he would bring to bond-slave's low estate,
With wife and child, the man who caused this shame :
Nor did he speak in vain ; but when his guilt
Was cleansed, he came, with army hired to help,
Against the town of Eurytos ; for he, 260
So said he, of all men that live, alone
Was guilty of that suffering, in that he,
When Heracles had come, in hearth and home
An old guest-friend, provoked his soul with words,
And many things spake out in baneful mood ;
As this, that he, though having in his hands
His deadly darts, in skill of archery
Would fall below his children, and that he
*Wore out his life a slave instead of free ;
And once at feast-time, staggering with the wine,
He cast him out. And then, in wrath for this,
When Iphitos to yon Tirynthian hill 274
Came tracking out the course of wandering steeds,
With eyes that looked this way, and thoughts turned
that,
He hurled him headlong from the tower-like crag.

¹ The *mythos* ran that Zeus, wroth at the murder of Iphitos, sent
Hermes to sell Heracles to Omphale.

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

And full of wrath for this thing that he did,
 Olympian Zeus, the father of us all,
 Sent him forth sold in bondage, spared him not,
 Because he slew this man, alone of men,
 With base deceit ; for, had he come on him
 In open fight, then Zeus had pardoned him
 With justice conquering ; for wanton wrong
 Not even Gods can bear with. Those that waxed 280
 Too haughty in the pride of evil speech
 Are dwellers now in Hades, all of them,
 Their city captured. These thou look'st upon,
 Falling from high estate to piteous life,
 Now come to thee : for so thy husband charged,
 And I, his faithful servant, do his will.
 And as for him, when he pure sacrifice
 Has offered unto Zeus, his fathers' God,
 For that great capture, think of him as near ;
 Of all things spoken well the sweetest this. 290

Chor. Now, O my queen, thou see'st thy joy full clear,
 Part close at hand, part learning by report.

Deian. How can I but rejoice with all my heart,
 Hearing my husband's high prosperity ?
 [Needs must that that should go along with this ;]
 And yet, for those who scan and look around,
 Is cause to fear for one who prospers much,
 Lest he too fail. Sad pity creeps on me,
 My friends, when I behold these wretched ones
 In a strange land as homeless, fatherless ; 300
 And they who sprang, perchance, from free-born sires,
 Now lead the life of bond-slaves. Grant, O Zeus,
 Thou God averting evil, that I ne'er
 May see Thee coming thus against my seed,
 Nor, if Thou needs must work Thy will on them,
 Fulfil it while I live. Such dread I feel
 Beholding these. [*To IOLE.*] O hapless one, what lot,
 A maiden's, or a mother's, falls to thee ?

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Thy growth and form would say that thou had'st known
None of these things ; and sure they witness too
That thou art nobly born. Come, Lichas, say
Whose daughter is this stranger ? Who her mother, ³¹⁶
And who the father that begat her ? Speak,
For more than all my whole heart pities her,
As, more than all, her soul is quick to feel.

Lichas. How should I know ? Why ask'st thou me ?
Perchance

She springs from those not held in least repute.

Deian. Of royal race ? The seed of Eurytos ?

Lichas. I know not, for I did not question much.

Deian. Has none of her companions told her name ?

Lichas. Not so. My work in silence I performed.

Deian. [*To IOLE.*] Tell me, at least, O sad one, of
thyself. ³²⁰

['Tis sorrow not to know thee who thou art.]

Lichas. I trow that now she will not utter words,
True to her former self, that would not speak
Of matters small or great, but ever sad,
In travail sore with weight of bitter chance,
She weeps and weeps, since first she left her home,
Where all the winds sweep wildly. This her state
Is ill for her, and yet it calls for pity.

Deian. Let her then be, and go within the house,
Just as may please her best, nor let her have ³³⁰
Fresh grief from me, as added unto those
She bears already. That which now she has
Is full enough. And now let all of us
Go to the house, that thou may'st hasten on
Where thou desirest, and that I may set
In meet array what calls for care within.

[*Exeunt LICHAS, IOLE, and the other captives,*
DEIANEIRA following.

Mess. [*Stopping DEIANEIRA on her way out.*] First tarry
here a little while and learn,

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Apart from these, whom thou dost lead within,
And what thou hast not heard, may now learn well,
For I have got the whole truth of these things.

Deian. What means this? Wherefore dost thou stop
me thus?

Mess. Stand thou, and list; for neither did'st thou hear
An idle speech before, nor now, I trow. [³⁴⁰

Deian. Shall we, then, call those strangers back again?
Or wilt thou tell thy tale to me and these?

Mess. Nought hinders thee and these. Let those alone.

Deian. And they indeed are gone; so tell thy tale.

Mess. Of all he said this man not one word speaks
With truth and right, but either basest now,
Or else before, as falsest herald came.

Deian. What say'st thou? Tell me clearly what thou
mean'st;

I nothing know of all the things thou say'st. 350

Mess. I, I myself heard this man say aloud—
Yes, before many hearers—that our lord,
For this girl's sake, did conquer Eurytos,
And captive take high-towered Œchalia;
That Love alone of all the Gods that are
Had charmed him to achieve this enterprise,
And not what passed in Lydia, nor his toil
In bondage unto Omphale, nor fate
Of Iphitos; and this man, thrusting back
All speech of Love, says just the contrary.
But when he could not win her father's will
To give his child to share clandestine bed, 360
He, with some cause of quarrel furbished up,
Invades the country ruled by Eurytos,
And slays the king her father, and lays low
Her city; and, as thou beholdest now,
He brings her to this house (believe it, lady)
Not without purpose, no, nor as a slave;
Look not for that: it is not probable,

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

When he has been so hot in his desire.
So it seemed good to tell the truth to thee,
The whole truth as I heard it from this man ;
And many heard it also, e'en as I, 270
In all the throng of Trachis' market-place ;
So thou may'st test the truth. And if I speak
Unwelcome news, I too am grieved indeed ;
But at all costs I speak the right and true.

Deian. Oh ! woe is me ! What fate is come on me ?
What mischief have I brought beneath my roof,
In secret lurking ? Ah ! and was she then
Without a name, as he who brought her swore ?

Mess. Noble is she in beauty as in race, 280
The daughter of the house of Eurytos,
And Iole her name, of whose descent
He nothing asked, forsooth, and nothing told.

Chor. A curse on all the wicked, most of all,
On him who loves ill deeds of secret guile.

Deian. What must I do, my friends ? As one o'er-
whelmed,
I stand perplexed by this report we hear.

Chor. Go, ask the man, for he, perchance, will speak
Clear answers, if thou question roundly with him.

Deian. And I will go ; for wisely thou dost speak.

Mess. Shall we remain ? Or what is right to do ? 290

Deian. Remain ; for here the man approaches us,
Not summoned, but self-bidden, from the house.

Enter LICHAS.

Lichas. What message hast thou, queen, for Heracles ?
Tell me, for I, thou see'st, am on my way.

Deian. How quickly, having come with lingering time,
Thou startest, ere we can our talk renew.

Lichas. Here am I, if thou seek'st to question me.

Deian. And wilt thou give thy pledge of truthful
speech ?

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Lichas. In all things I do know, so help me, Zeus.

Deian. Who then is this, the maid thou bring'st to
us ? 400

Lichas. Eubœan is she. What her birth I know not.

Mess. Ho, then ! Look here. Dost know to whom
thou speak'st ?

Lichas. And thou, why ask'st thou question such as
this ?

Mess. Be bold, and speak, if thou my meaning see'st.

Lichas. I speak unto the queenly Deianeira,
Daughter of Ceneus, wife of Heracles,
My mistress too, unless I see amiss.

Mess. 'Twas this I wished to learn from thee. Thou
say'st

That she stands here, thy mistress ?

Lichas. Rightly so.

Mess. Well, then, what forfeit wilt thou rightly pay, 410
If thou be found as one doing wrong to her ?

Lichas. "Doing wrong ?" What cunning riddles,
pray, are these ?

Mess. None here, 'tis thou hast gone too far in that.

Lichas. I go : I was a fool to list so long.

Mess. Not so, before thou answerest one small word.

Lichas. Say what thou wilt. Thou art not taciturn.

Mess. That captive whom thou broughtest to this
house,

Dost thou know her ?

Lichas. E'en so. Why askest thou ?

Mess. Did'st thou not say that she whom thou did'st
bring,

*On whom thou look'st with such blank ignorance,
Was Iole, the child of Eurytos ? 420

Lichas. Among what men ? Say, who and whence
is he

Shall come and witness that he heard me say it ?

Mess. Full many a townsman : In the market-place

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Of Trachis all the crowd did hear thy speech.

Lichas. I said I heard it, but 'tis not the same
To speak one's guess, and vouch the matter true.

Mess. "One's guess!" And did'st not thou assert
with oath
That thou did'st bring her, bride for Heracles?

Lichas. "His bride!" By all the Gods, my mistress
dear,

Tell of this stranger, who and what he is. 430

Mess. One who was by and heard thee, when thou
said'st

How through desire for her the city fell,
And how 'twas not the Lydian dame, but love
For this fair maid that brought it to the dust.

Lichas. Bid the man go, dear lady. Thus to prate
With one of mind diseased is hardly sane.

Deian. Now, by great Zeus, who flashes forth his fire
On yon high glens of Cæta, cheat me not,
I charge thee, of the truth. Thou dost not tell
Thy tale to wife of evil mood, nor one
Who does not know men's ways, and how their wont
Is not to love the same for evermore; 440

And one who stands in combat against Love,
As athlete in close conflict, scarce is wise.
For he reigns high, supreme above the Gods,
And sways them as he will; (yea, sways my soul,
And why not then another's, like to me?)
So, should I blame my husband for his fate
In catching this disease, I should indeed
Have lost my reason; or if I should blame
This woman, guilty of no shameful deed,
Or wrong against me. No. It is not so;
But if, being taught by him, thou speakest false,
Then thou hast learnt a lesson far from good, 450
And, if thou art self-taught in this deceit,
Then, when thou seek'st to play the part of good,

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Thou shalt be seen as evil. Nay, but speak
The truth, the whole truth. No good fate is that,
When one free-born must bear the liar's name.
How can'st thou 'scape detection? There are many
To whom thou said'st it, who will tell it me;
And if thou fearest, thou dost ill to shrink,
For not to learn, that might indeed distress me;
But how can knowledge harm me? Has he not,
Our Heracles, of all the men that live, 400
Wedded most wives, and yet not one of them
Has had from me or evil speech or taunt,
Nor will she have, though she in love for him
Should melt and pine; for lo! I pitied her
When first I saw her, for her beauty's sake;
For it, I knew, had wrecked her life's fond hope,
And she, poor soul, against her will, had wrought
The ruin of her fatherland, and brought
Its people into bondage. Let all this
Go to the winds. For thee I bid thee, I,
Be base to others, but to me be true.

Chor. Yes, hearken thou to her considerate speech,
And then in time to come thou shalt not blame 470
This woman, and from me shalt favour win.

Lichas. Well, then, dear mistress, since I see that thou,
Being human, hast a human heart, and know'st
No stubborn purpose, I will tell thee all,
The whole truth, nought concealing. All is so
As this man tells thee. Strong desire for her
Did seize on Heracles, and so her land,
Cechalia, was laid waste by armed host,
And brought full low. And this (for I must tell
His doings also) he nor bade conceal
Nor yet denied, but I myself, dear lady, 480
Fearing to grieve thy heart with these my words,
Did sin, if thou dost count it as a sin.
And now, since thou dost know the whole of things,

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

For his sake and for thine, full equally,
Treat the girl kindly, and those words of thine
Thou said'st of her, be firm and true to them,
For he, whose might prevails in all things else,
In all is conquered by his love for her.

Deian. We share thy thoughts, will do as thou hast
said, 490

And will not stir, by fighting with the Gods,
The ill now brought upon us. Let us go
Within the house, that thou may'st bear my message,
And gifts for gifts which it is meet to send,
That thou may'st take them, for it were not right
That thou who cam'st with such a company
Should go back empty. [*Exeunt DEIANEIRA, LICHAS,*
and Messenger.

STROPHE

Chor. Great is the conquering might
Which she of Kypros boasteth evermore.
I hasten by what touches on the Gods,
And will not even tell
How she beguiled the son of Kronos old, 500
Or Hades of the dark,
Or him who shakes the earth, Poseidaôn;
But who for this fair bride,
As well-matched rivals came,
Before the marriage-feast?
Who fought in many a struggle sore and sharp,
Blows thickly falling, wrestlings in the dust?

ANTISTROPHE

A mighty stream was one,
Dread form of monster bull, with lofty horn,
The torrent Acheloös, river-God,
Come from Cœniadæ,¹

¹ Cœniadæ, at the mouth of the Acheloös in Acarnania.

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

And one from Thebes which Bacchos owns as his, 519
 Wielding his pliant bow,
His spear and club, the son of Zeus supreme.
 So they in conflict met,
 Urged on by hot desire ;
 And She, of Kypros queen,
Alone stood by, fair source of marriage joy,
Wielding her rod of umpire's sovereignty.

EPODE

Clash of hands and darts,
And, mingling with them both,
The din of horns, were there,
Limbs intertwined with limbs,
Fierce blows from butting head, 520
And loud deep cries on either side were heard
And she in beauty delicate and fair,
Sat still awaiting her appointed lord,
Where from the hill the prospect far was seen
 Such is the tale we tell,
 *E'en as her mother saw ;
 And lo ! the bride's fair face,
 The prize of all the strife,
 Still piteously abides,
 And from her mother's care
 She, like lorn heifer, strays. 530

Enter DEIANEIRA.

Deian. While, O my friends, the stranger speaks
 within,
To those poor captives, as about to start,
I come without to see you secretly,
In part to tell you what my hands devise,
In part to crave your pity for my wrongs.
This maiden I receive,—and yet I trow
No longer maid, but one already wed,—

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

As sailor who takes in a troublous freight,
So a bad bargain I receive in her,
Poor wage for all my love. And so we share,
We twain, th' embrace one coverlet conceals.
Such is the meed of all my care of home,
That Heracles, whom men call true and good,
Hath sent to me for all my years of toil ;
And I indeed have found it hard to feel
Fierce wrath against him, with this fell disease
Sore smitten as he is. But who could bear,
What woman's heart, with such a one to dwell,
And share one bed with her ? Her bloom I see
Still coming on, and mine begins to wane ;
*And well I know the eye is wont to seize
*That blossom fair, and turn the foot from age.
And so I fear lest Heracles be found
My lawful spouse, but husband fond and true
Of her the younger. But, as I have said,
It is not good a wife of judgment sound
Should show her anger. Therefore, O my friends,
I tell you what I have as remedy
To set me free. A gift long since I had
From the old Centaur stored in vase of bronze,
Which I, while yet a girl, from Nessos had,
As he, with swarth, rough mane, did bleed to death,
For he was wont to carry men for pay
Across Evenos' deep and torrent stream,
Nor plying oars, nor spreading sail of ship.
And he, when first, as bride of Heracles,
I followed from my father's house sent forth,
Upon his shoulders bore me, and, mid-stream,
With rude hands touched me. And I shouted out ;
And then the son of Zeus quick turned, and shot
A wingèd dart, which, whizzing through the breast,
Pierced to the lungs. And then the monster spake
In agony of death thus much : " O child

648

650

660

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Of Ceneus old, if thou wilt list to me,
Some profit of my ferryings thou shalt have, 570
Since thee I bore the last. If thou wilt take
The clotted blood that oozes from my wound,
Where the Lernæan hydra, monster dread,
The darts in dark gall dipped, this, this shall be
Thy love-charm o'er the soul of Heracles,
That he shall never look on woman fair,
And love her more than thee." And I, dear friends,
Recalling this, (for, on his death, within
I kept it safely stored,) have dipped this robe,
And added all things that he bade me do, 580
While yet he lived; and now 'tis fully done.
Base deeds of daring may I never know,
Nor learn that lesson; those that dare I hate.
But if by love-spells meant for Heracles,
We can in anywise this girl o'ercome,
The thing is planned and done, unless I seem
To you to work in vain; if so, I cease.

Chor. If there be ground for faith in what thou dost,
Thou seem'st to us not badly to have planned.

Deian. Thus stands my faith, I think it probable, 590
While yet I have not made experiment.

Chor. But thou should'st know by act, for thinking
only

Without a trial gives no certain proof.

Deian. Well, we shall know full soon, for lo! he stands
E'en now outside the door, and quickly comes;
Only keep ye my counsel. In the dark,
Though thou work shameful things, thou 'scapest shame.

Enter LICHAS.

Lichas. Come, child of Ceneus, tell me what to do;
For we long time have loitered in delay.

Deian. This very thing I have been doing, Lichas, 600
While thou within did'st to those strangers speak,

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

That thou should'st take this stately-woven robe.
 Gift to my husband from these hands of mine.
 And when thou giv'st it say that none that lives,
 Prior to him must wear it on his flesh,
 Nor must the light of sunshine look on it,
 Nor sacred shrine, nor flame of altar hearth,
 Before he stands, conspicuous, showing it
 On day of sacrifice, in sight of Gods.
 For so I vowed, if I should see him safe
 At home, or hear his safety well assured,
 To clothe him with this tunic, and send forth
 *The glorious worshipper in glorious robe ;
 And thou shalt take a token of these things,
 Which he, the seal beholding, will know well.
 But go thy way, and first take heed to this,
 Being but a courier, not to meddle much ;
 And next so act that from myself and him,
 Our thanks from single may as twofold come.

810

Lichas. As true as I serve Hermes in my work,
 A trusty messenger, I will not fail
 To take and give this package as it is,
 And add good proof of all thy messages.

620

Deian. Now then start forth, for thou dost know
 right well
 How things within our dwelling chance to stand.

Lichas. I know, and I will say that all is well.

Deian. And how the stranger maiden fares, thou
 know'st,

[Seeing that warm welcome I received her with.]

Lichas. So much so, that my heart leapt up for joy.

Deian. Why should'st thou tell aught else ? for much
 I fear

630

Lest thou should'st tell my longing love for him,
 Before we know if he doth long for us.

[*Exit LICHAS ; DEIANEIRA withdraws
 into her house.*]

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

STROPHE I

Chor. O ye that dwell along the harbour's shore,
Or by the rock's hot streams,¹
And Cæta's mountain slopes,
Or the mid Melian lake,
Or by Her shore who owns the golden darts,
Where the high courts of all the Hellenes meet,
From Pylæ named of old.

ANTISTROPHE I

Soon will the clear-voiced flute return to you
With no unfitting strain,
But like a lyre with hymn
And song the Gods approve;²
For, lo! the hero whom Zeus owns as son,
Of fair Alcmena born, hastes home to us,
With trophies of high worth.

640

STROPHE II

Him we, (for twelve long months,
Still waiting, knowing nought of all that passed,)
Counted as wanderer far upon the sea ;
And she, his dear-loved wife,
Weeping with many tears,
Full sadly wore her saddened heart away,
But Ares, roused to rage,
Hath freed us from our dark and troublous days.

650

ANTISTROPHE II

Ah may he come, yea, come !

¹ The rock's hot streams are those between the mountains and the coast which gave a name to the narrow pass of Thermopylæ. The Melian lake is strictly a gulf. The goddess of the golden darts is Artemis, the guardian of all the havens of Thessaly. The "high Courts of the Hellenes" are the Amphietyonic assemblies that held their sessions near Thermopylæ.

² Ordinarily the "flute" was the accompaniment of wild ecstatic songs and dances. "Now," the Chorus says, "it shall be subdued into a calm, serene music like that of the lyre at festivals of the Gods."

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Let not his ship of many oars lie to,
Before this city welcomes his approach ;

Leaving the island hearth,

Where he his victim slays,

*Thence may he come, yea, come with strong desire, 660

Tempered by suasive spell,

Of that rich unguent, as the Monster spake.

Enter DEIANEIRA from the house.

Deian. Ah, women ! how I fear lest all I did
But now be found as having gone too far.

Chor. What now, O child of Ceneus, Deianeira ?

Deian. I know not ; but I tremble lest too soon
I seem with fair hopes to have wrought great ill.

Chor. Not from those gifts thou gav'st to Heracles ?

Deian. Yes. It is that ; and never more would I
Bid any yield to impulse hazardous. 670

Chor. If thou may'st tell it, tell me what thou dread'st.

Deian. Thus much has happened, O my friends, most
strange,

For you to hear, yea, passing all belief :

For that with which but now I did anoint

The stately snow-white robe, a lock of wool,

This is all gone, by nought within consumed,

But, self-devoured, it withers and decays,

And crumbles on the surface of the stone.

And that thou may'st the whole strange story know,

How this was done, I will unfold the tale ;

For I, of all the monster Kentaur taught, 680

(His side sore smitten with the bitter dart,)

No precept left undone, but kept them all,

Like writing on a tablet-book of bronze,

Which nothing may wash out. And this command

Was given, and this I did, to keep the charm

Medicinal, untouched by fire, or sun,

In sheltered closet, till the hour should come

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

To use the fresh-spread unguent. Thus I did ;
And now the time to act was come, I spread it,
Within the house, in secret, with a lock
Of fleecy wool from off mine own sheep cut ; 690
And then I folded it, and placed it safe,
Untouched by sunlight, in a hollow chest,
The gift, as ye have seen. And now, within
Adventuring, I behold a marvel, strange
To tell, by human thought unfathomable ;
For I, by chance, had flung the wisp of wool,
In full broad sunshine. Then as it grew hot
It melts away, and crumbles in the earth,
In look most like to saw-dust one may see
Where men work timber ; so it fell and lay, 700
And from the earth where it had lain, there oozed
Thick clots of foam, as when in vintage bright,
Rich must is poured upon the earth from vine
Sacred to Bacchos ; and I know not now
Which way of thought to turn, but see too well
That I have done a deed most perilous.
What cause had he, the Kentaur, dying then,
To wish me well on whose account he died ?
It cannot be. But seeking to destroy
The man that smote him, he beguiled my soul ;
And I, too late, when knowledge nought avails, 710
That knowledge gain. For, if my soul errs not,
I, I alone (ah me !) shall work his death ;
For well I know the piercing dart sore vexed
E'en Cheiron, though a God,¹ and, where it smites,
Lays low in death all monsters. Can it be
That this black venom, oozing from his wounds,
With blood commingled, shall not slay him too ?

¹ The legend ran that when the Kentaur took refuge in Cheiron's cave on Pelion, Heracles, who was pursuing them, wounded Cheiron in the knee, and he, being a God, could neither be healed nor die, till Zeus gave leave to him to descend to Hades in lieu of Prometheus.

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

So I at least must deem ; yet deem I too
 If he shall die, that I shall die with him 720
 By that same death-stroke ; since for one to live
 With evil fame who makes her chiefest boast
 Not to be evil, that is hard to bear.

● *Chor.* We needs must shrink at thought of dreadful
 deeds,

Yet should not count too soon on good or ill.

Deian. Not so, not so ; in schemes that are not good
 There is no hope to give one confidence.

Chor. And yet for those who sin not wilfully
 Anger is softened ; and that case is thine.

Deian. Such words one well might speak, who does
 not share

The ill, on whom no evil presses close. 730

Enter HYLLOS.

Chor. 'Twere well that thou should'st cease all further
 speech,

Unless thou sayest aught to this thy son ;
 For here he comes who went to seek his sire.

Hyllos. My mother, I could wish one thing of three—
 Or that thou should'st no longer live ; or else
 Live, and be called my mother nevermore ;
 Or gain in some way better heart than now.

Deian. What is there, son, thus worthy of thy hate ?

Hyllos. Know, of thy husband, whom I father call,
 Thou art, this very day, the murderess. 740

Deian. Ah me, my son ! what word is this thou
 bring'st ?

Hyllos. One which no power on earth can cancel now ;
 For who can make undone what once has been ?

Deian. What say'st thou, O my son ? By what man
 taught,

Say'st thou that I have done so base a deed ?

Hyllos. I, with these eyes my father's piteous fate

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Myself beholding, to no tales gave heed.

Deian. Where did'st thou meet him? Where stand
by and see?

Hyllos. If thou must learn, 'tis well to tell thee all.

When he had sacked the town of Eurytos,
Renowned in story, and was on his way
With trophies and first-fruits of victory, 750
There stands a high Eubæan promontory,
Keneian named, sea-washed on either side,
And there to Zeus, his father, he marks out
His altars, and the consecrated grove,
And there with eager welcome first I saw him;
And, when about to offer sacrifice
Of many victims, Lichas comes from home,
His home-reared herald, bearing in his arms
Thy gift, the fatal robe. And he, arrayed
In it, as thou did'st bid him, slaughtered there
Twelve oxen tall, the first-fruits of the spoil; 760
But altogether, cattle great and small,
A hundred did he offer. First, poor wretch,
With soul serene, rejoicing to be decked
In that apparel, thus he made his prayers.
But, when the blood-fed flame from resinous pine
And from the holy things began to blaze,
There came a sweat upon his flesh, and lo!
As though fresh glued by some artificer,
The tunic folds around his every joint,
And through his bones there went convulsive starts,
And when the venom of the hateful snake 770
Devoured his flesh, he called poor Lichas to him,
In nothing guilty of this crime of thine,
And asked with what device he brought the robe.
And he, poor wretch, nought knowing, said the gift
Was thine alone, as thou did'st bid him say.
And when he heard it, and a spasm of pain
Had seized his chest, he grasped him by the foot,

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Just where the ancle hinges on its joint,
And hurled him on the rock, on either side
Washed by the waters ; then from curling locks 780
The white brain gushed, his skull being split in twain,¹
With blood commingled. And a cry went up,
A cry of all the people, as they saw
So tortured one, and one so foully slain.
And no one dared to go and face the man,
For strange convulsions drew him, now to earth,
Now lifted up, with cries of agony,
And all the rocks re-echoed his complaints,
The Locrian headlands and Eubœan capes.
And, when his spirit failed, full oft he dashed
Himself upon the earth, full oft he groaned, 790
Cursing his marriage that he made with thee,
That wedlock fraught with evils, and the ties
With Cœneus made, how great a bane he found them
Wearing his life. And when from out the smoke
That clung around he turned his eye askance,
And saw me in the midst of all the host,
Weeping for grief, he gazed, and called on me.
“ My son, come hither, turn not thou aside
From this my trouble, even though 'twere thine
To die as I am dying. But, I pray,
Bear me away ; and chiefly, place me there
Where never mortal eye may look on me ; 800
Or from this land, at least, if pity move thee,
With all speed bear me, that I die not here.”
And when he thus had charged me, in mid-ship
We placed him, and to this land steered our way,
He groaning in convulsions, and ere long
Or living or just dead wilt thou behold him.

¹ Popular tradition in the time of Æschylos, (p. 29,) pointed to a rock in the Eubœan gulf as the grave of Lichas. Later legends found a human form in the rock, and told that the victim had been transformed into the rock (Ovid, *Metap.*, ix. 226).

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Such deeds, my mother, 'gainst my father thou
Wast seen to have planned and acted, and on thee
May sternest Justice and Erinnyes swift
Inflict their vengeance, . . . if that prayer be right, . . .
And right it is, for thou the right hast scorned, 810
Murdering the noblest man of all the earth,
Of whom thou ne'er shalt see the like again.

[*Exit DEIANEIRA, slowly, and despondingly.*

Chor. [*To DEIANEIRA, as she goes.*] Why creep'st thou
off in silence? Know'st thou not

That silence but admits the accuser's charge?

Hyllos. Let her creep off. Fair wind go with her now,
As she creeps on away from these mine eyes:
What need to vainly cherish vainest show
Of mother's name, where mother's acts are not?
No! Let her go, in God's name, and the joy
She gives my father, may it fall on her. [*Exit.* 820

STROPHE I

Chor. See, O ye maidens fair,
How even now there comes upon our view
The word of augury,
Sprung from high foresight in the days of old,
Which said the earing-tide
Of the twelfth year should come in cycle full,¹
And bring the son of Zeus a rest from toil;
And now, with prosperous breeze,
It speeds unto its end;
For how can he, who sees no more the light,
Still serve in tasks of toil? 830

ANTISTROPHE I

For if the Kentaur's craft
Wraps him, resistless, in dark cloud of death,

¹ Deianeira had dwelt on the oracle which promised a great change after an absence of fifteen months. The Chorus looks back to an earlier prediction given twelve years before.

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

While the thick venom melts,
Which death brought forth and spotted dragon fed,
How can he see the light
Of other day than this,
*Wasting away with hydra's earful spell,
While, still in varied forms,
The subtly working pangs
Of him, the beast with rough and swarthy mane, 846
Torture with fiercest heat ?

STROPHE II

And she, ill-starred one, seeing a great wrong
Rush with no lingering on her hearth and home,
From new-formed marriage ties
Gave but small heed to what had passed of old,
Nor what had come from stranger's counsel false,
With issues of dread doom.
Full sure she now bewails,
Full sure she weeps fresh dew of plenteous tears ;
And Fate, in onward course,
Brings forth a subtle, great calamity. 850

ANTISTROPHE II

It bursts full stream, the fountain of hot tears ;
The plague (oh, heavens !) spreads over every limb,
The like of which from foes
Ne'er came to vex the far-famed son of Zeus.
Ah ! the dark point of champion's foremost spear,
Which then bore off the bride,
Won by the right of war,
From high Œchalia's peaks ! while dumbly working
She who o'er Kypros reigns,
Is seen the mighty doer of the whole. 860
1st Maiden. Am I deceived, or do I hear indeed
The sound of wailing coming from the house ?
What shall I say ?

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

2nd Maiden. No doubtful voice I hear,
But miserable, wailing cry within;
And, lo! our house is on the eve of change.

Enter Nurse.

3rd Maiden. Look then on her who comes with tight-
drawn brow,
Old and in sorrow, as with news to tell. 870

Nurse. Oh, girls! No little evil has it caused,
That fatal gift she sent to Heracles.

Chor. Oh, full of years! What new deed tell'st thou of?

Nurse. Moving no step has Deianeira gone
The very last of all her ways on earth.

Chor. Thou dost not speak of death?

Nurse. My tale is told.

Chor. And is she dead?

Nurse. Again thou hearest it.

Chor. Poor doomed one, and how was it that she died?

Nurse. In way most piteous.

Chor. With what death, I pray? 880

Nurse. She slew herself.

Chor. What madness or disease

With blow of deadly weapon slew her too?

And how, alone, none with her, did she thus

Add death to death?

Nurse. With stroke of ruthless blade.

Chor. And did'st thou see, O babbler, this foul deed?

Nurse. I saw it clear, as standing close at hand.

Chor. What was it? Tell, I pray. 890

Nurse. With her own hands

She did the deed.

Chor. What say'st thou?

Nurse. Things too clear.

Chor. Truly this new-found bride

Brings forth, brings forth to those who dwell with us

A great calamity.

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Nurse. Too great indeed, and had'st thou stood and
seen

What things she did thou would'st have pitied her.

[*Chor.* And could a woman's hand cause woe so great?

Nurse. 'Twas dreadful : but thy witness thou shalt
bear,

Hearing my tale, that I have told the truth ;]

For when she came alone within the house,

900

And saw her son, within the palace courts,

A hollowed couch preparing, that he might

Go back to meet his father, she, concealed

Where none might see her, on the altar fell,

And wailed aloud that they were desolate,

And wept, poor wretch, still touching household things

Which use had made familiar. Wandering round,

Now here, now there, throughout her dwelling-place,

If she perchance some faithful servant saw,

The poor soul wept, as she did look on them,

910

Still calling out upon her evil fate,

Her future lot of utter childlessness :

And when this ceased, I see her suddenly

Rush wildly to the bed of Heracles,

And I, close hidden, with a secret eye,

Watched her, and saw her lay the coverlet

Outspread upon the couch of Heracles ;

And when this ended, leaping in, she sat,

Just in the very centre of the bed :

And weeping scalding tide of many tears,

Thus spake she : " Ah, my bridal bower, and bed,

920

Henceforth, farewell ; for never more shall ye

Receive me in this couch a slumberer."

And, saying this, with eager hand she loosed

Her robe, where golden buckle fastened it

Below her breast, and tore the garment off

From her left arm and bosom. And I ran

With all my strength to tell her son of this

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

That she was doing. While we went and came,
We saw that she had struck with two-edged blade 930
Below the heart and bosom, and her son
Saw it, and groaned. For well he knew, poor wretch,
That he, in wrath, had driven her on to this,
Learning too late from those that are within
That she against her will had done the deed,
Led to it by the Kentaur. And her son,
In deepest woe, ceased not to pour lament,
Wailing her fate, nor yet to kiss her lips,
But, falling side by side, he lay and groaned,
That he had falsely brought a charge of guilt 940
Against her, wailing that he now was left,
Of father and of mother both bereaved.
So stand things there ; and if one dares to count
On two short days, or more, vain fool is he ;
The morrow is as nought, till one has passed
The present day in fair prosperity. [Exit.

STROPHE I

Chor. Which shall I wail for first ?
Which sorrow goes furthest in woe ?
Hard question is this to decide,
For me at least in my grief.

ANTISTROPHE I

One evil we see close at hand, 950
And one we await in our fear :
And whether we see or await,
The sorrow is equal in both.

STROPHE II

Would that some blast of the winds
Might rise with fair gale on our hearth,
And carry me far from these climes,
That I might not die in my fear,
At the sight of this strong son of Zeus,

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

For, lo ! they say that he comes
To his home in pain none can heal,
A marvel of infinite woe.

880

ANTISTROPHE II

Near, close at hand, not far off,
I wailed, as a nightingale sad ;
Dread steps of strangers draw nigh.
And how do they bear him ? They come,
As mourning a friend, with hushed tread ;
Silently so is he borne.
Ah, must we deem him as dead,
Or has he fallen asleep ?

870

*Enter HYLLOS, Elder, and Others, bearing HERACLES
on a couch.*

Hyllos. Ah me ! ah me, O my father !
Ah me, for thee in my woe !
What must I suffer, ah me !
What shall I counsel or plan ?

Elder. Hush, my son ! lest thou stir
Thy sore-vexed father's woe ;
Still lives he, though he lies
Thus prostrate on his couch :
Hush ! bite thy lips ; be still.

Hyllos. How say'st thou ? Doth he live .

Elder. Wake him not, plunged in sleep ;
Move him not, lest thou rouse,
O boy, the dreaded scourge,
That drives him in frenzy of soul.

880

Hyllos. Yea ; but on me, in my woe,
Presses a boundless grief ;
Wildly my spirit swells.

Hera. [*Waking.*] Zeus ! In what land am I ?
On whose coasts lie, laid low
In anguish nought can soothe ?

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Ah ! once more the dire pest
Gnaws the heart's inmost core.

Elder. [*To HYLLOS.*] Did'st thou not know what gain
Lies in restraining speech,
Not driving sleep from his eyes ? 990

Hyllos. And yet, beholding this,
How could I hold my peace ?

Hera. O thou Kenæan rock,
Where altars crown the height,
What thanks for what great gifts
Hast thou, O Zeus, wrought out
For me in my great woe !
What, ah ! what great hurt
Hast thou appointed me !
Would that thou ne'er had'st met
These eyes of mine, to see

This crown of frenzy none have power to soothe ! 1000
What charmer, what skilled leech,
Less than great Zeus himself,
Will soothe this direst woe ?
Far off is that wonder to see.

Ah ! ah !

Leave me to sleep, yes, leave me, wretched one ;
Leave me to sleep my sleep.
Where dost thou touch me ? Where move ?
Death thou wilt bring ; yea, bring death.
What awhile knew repose
Now thou dost stir again ;
It grasps me, creeping still.

Where are ye, of all men that live on the earth most
ungrateful ? 1010

For whom I of old, in all forests and seas, slaying monsters,
Wore out my life ; and now, when I lie sore smitten
before you,
Not one of you all will bring the fire or the sword that
will help me.

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

276
Ah me ! will no one come,
And, smiting my head, put a stop
To this weary struggle of life ?
Ah ! woe is me ! Woe is me !

Elder. O boy, that art this hero's son, the task
Goes far beyond my strength. Do thou take part ;
Thy hand is stronger far than mine to save.

Hyllos. I lay my hand upon him, but to grant
A life that shall forget its toil and pain,
This neither from mine own nor others' help
Is mine to work. Zeus only giveth that.

1024

Hera. Ah, boy ! Where art thou, boy ?
Lift me a little. This way, this way prop.

Ah ! O ye Heavens !
Again it seizes, seizes in dread strength,
To the grave bringing low,
The fierce disease no healing skill may reach.

1030

O Pallas ! Pallas ! yet again it stings.
Have pity, my son, on thy father ; strike with a sword
none will blame ;

Strike me under the neck, and heal the pain which she
wrought,

Thy mother, godless in guilt. Ah, may I see her brought
low,

Slain, yea, as thus she slays !

O Hades, kind and sweet,

1040

Twin-born brother of Zeus,

Lull me, lull me to sleep,

With fate that brooks no delay,

Smiting the man worn with woe.

Chor. I shudder, as I hear, my friends, the griefs
With which our king, being what he is, is vexed.

Hera. Ah me ! full many labours hard to tell,
Many and fierce, with hand and strength of back
Have I wrought out. And ne'er the wife of Zeus
Such task assigned, nor yet Eurystheus harsh,

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

As did that child of Æneus, steeped in guile, 1050
Casting around my shoulders such a net,
Erinnys-woven, that has wrought my death ;
For, cleaving to my side, it eats within,
Consuming all my flesh, and from my lungs,
Still winding in, it drains my arteries,
Drinks the warm blood, and I am done to death,
My whole frame bound with this unheard of chain ;
And never yet did host on battle-plain,
Nor earth-born troop of Giants, nor the might
Of savage beasts, nor Hellas, nor the land 1060
Of men that speak not,¹ nor the regions vast
I traversed clearing, work a deed like this :
But she, a woman, woman-like in mind,
Not of man's strength, alone, without a sword,
She has destroyed me ; and do thou, my son,
Prove thyself truly mine, and honour not
Thy mother's name henceforward more than mine ;
But thou thyself with thine own hands from home
To my hands bring her, that I thus may know
If thou dost mourn my sorrow more than hers,
When thou shalt see her body maimed and shamed
In righteous judgment. Come, my son, be bold, 1070
And pity me, in all ways pitiable,
Who, like a girl must weep and shriek in pain ;
And yet there lives not one who, ere it came,
Could say that he had seen this man thus act,
But ever I bore pain without a groan ;
Yet now with this I grow a woman weak.
And now, come thou, and near thy father stand,
And see by what strange chance I suffer this ;
For I will show what lies below these wraps :
Come, all of you, behold this wretched frame,

¹ The "land of men that speak not" is simply that of the non-Hellenic races, whose speech seemed to the Greeks inarticulate as the chirping of coughts or swallows.

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Behold me, how I suffer piteously.

1080

Ah, miserable me !

Again the dart of pain is fever-hot,
And rushes through my breast. This cursed ill,
So seems it, will not leave me unassailed,
Still eating on. O Hades, king, receive me ;
Smite me, O flash of Zeus ; yea, shake, O king,
Yea, father, dart thy thunderbolts on me ;
For now once more it eats, it grows, it spreads.
O hands, my hands ! O back, and chest, and arms 1090
That once were dear, there lie ye now who once
Subdued by force the Nemean habitant,
The lion, troubler of the flocks and herds,
A monster none might war with or approach ;
And that Lernæan hydra, and the host
Of Kentaurs, all of double form, half-horse,
Fearful, and fierce, and lawless, strong and proud,
The beast of Erymanthos, and the dog
Of deepest Hades, with the triple head,
A portent awful ; and the dreaded shape
Of that fierce serpent, and the dragon guard
That at the world's end watched the golden fruit ; 1100
And thousand other toils I tasted of,
And no man raised his trophies over me ;
But now thus jointless, worn to rags and shreds,
By plague obscure I waste away in woe,
Who from a noble mother took my name,
Reputed son of Zeus the star-girt king :
But know this well, that though I be as nought,
As nothing creep, yet, even as I am,
I will smite her who brought me to this pass.
Let her but come that she may learn, and tell 1110
That I, or dead or living, punished guilt.

Chor. Oh, wretched Hellas ! what a weight of woe
Do I foresee if it shall lose this man !

Hyllos. Since thou, my father, lett'st me answer thee,

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

By this thy silence, hear in spite of pain,
For I will ask what 'tis but right to grant.
Give me thyself, not such as when thy wrath
Stings thee to frenzy ; else thou shalt not know
In what thou wrongly seekest to rejoice,
In what thou wrongly grieveest.

Hera. Say thy say,
And hold thy peace. I nothing understand, 1126
In this my pain, of all thy glozing speech.

Hyllos. I come to tell thee of my mother's plight,
And how she sinned, yet most unwillingly.

Hera. Vilest of all the vile, and hast thou dared
To speak of her, thy murd'ress mother, to me ?

Hyllos. So stands the case that silence would be wrong.

Hera. True, it were wrong, with all those sins of hers.

Hyllos. Thou wilt not speak thus of this day's offence.

Hera. Speak ; but look to it, lest thou too prove base.

Hyllos. I speak, then. She is dead, but now laid
low. 1130

Hera. By whom ? Strange portent tell'st thou with ill
words.

Hyllos. By her own hand : no other struck the blow.

Hera. Ah me ! Ere I could slay her as was meet ?

Hyllos. Even thy wrath would melt, did'st thou know
all.

Hera. Dread is thy preface, yet tell out thy tale.

Hyllos. In one short word, she sinned, desiring good.

Hera. Did she do good, thou vile one, slaying me ?

Hyllos. Thinking to send a charm to win thy love,
When she thy new bride saw, she missed her aim. [1140

Hera. And what Trachinian boasts such skill in charms ?

Hyllos. Nessos, of old, the Kentaur, counselled her
With such a spell to kindle thy desire.

Hera. Ah me ! ah me ! I die in wretchedness ;
I perish, perish : light is gone from me.

Woe ! woe ! I see what issue we have reached.

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Come, O my child ; thy father is no more :
 Call thou all those that name thee brother here,
 And call the poor Alcmena (all in vain
 The bride of Zeus) that ye may hear, and learn
 The last of all the oracles I know.

1150

Hyllos. Thy mother is not here, for so it chanced,
 She dwelleth now on Tiryns' further shore ;
 And of thy children some she rears with her,
 And some, know thou, dwell under Theban towers.
 But we, my father, that are present here,
 Will hear and do whatever thou shalt bid.

Hera. Hear then what presses. Thou hast reached an
 age

When thou must show what mould of man thou art,
 That thou art called my son. For, lo ! to me
 Long since it was revealèd of my Sire
 That I should die by hand of none that live,
 But one, who dead, had dwelt in Hades dark ;
 And thus the Centaur-monster, as was shown,
 Though dead, hath slain me who till now did live ;
 And I will show to thee new prophecies,
 Following on these, agreeing with the old,
 Which I, within the grove the Selli own,¹
 Who haunt the hills, and sleep upon the earth,
 Wrote down from that tall oak of many tongues,
 To Zeus, my father, sacred. And it said
 That in the time that liveth, and now is,
 Should come the end of labours. And I thought
 That all would prosper ; yet it meant nought else
 Than this my death, for unto those that die
 No labour comes. And now since this has come,
 Most clearly, O my son, 'tis meet for thee
 To come as helper to this sufferer here,

1160

1170

¹ The Selli are described by Homer (*Il.* xvi. 233) as hermit-prophets, dwelling around the Pelasgic shrine of Dodona, and interpreting the oracles which came from the sacred oak.

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

And not by lingering make my speech more sharp,
But yielding, working with me, finding thus
Thy noblest law, thy father to obey.

Hyllos. I dread, my father, bandying words with thee,
And will obey in all thou thinkest right. 1180

Hera. Give me thy right hand then as surest pledge.

Hyllos. To what end turnest thou an oath so dread?

Hera. Wilt thou not give it, and obey my voice ?

Hyllos. Lo, then, I give it, and will gainsay nought.

Hera. Swear by the head of Zeus who gave me life.

Hyllos. Swear to do what? Shall that be told me too?

Hera. That thou wilt do the work I set on thee.

Hyllos. So swear I, calling Zeus to bind the oath.

Hera. Pray thou that thou may'st suffer if thou fail.

Hyllos. I shall not suffer, for I'll act ; yet still,

I pray as thou dost bid me.

Hera.

Thou dost know

The topmost peak of Œta, claimed by Zeus?

Hyllos. Right well, for there I oft have sacrificed.

Hera. There thou must bear my body, thou thyself,
With friends whom thou may'st wish for, and must
pluck

Full many a branch of deeply-rooted oak,
And many a male wild olive,¹ and on them
Place this my body, and then, taking fire
Of pine-wood torch, must burn it. Let no tear
Of wailing enter in, but do thy deed,

If thou art mine, without or tear or groan ;

Or else, though I be in the grave, my curse

Shall rest upon thee, grievous evermore.

Hyllos. What say'st thou, O my father? Woe is me,
That thou hast thus dealt with me!

¹ Oak, because it was from that tree at Dodona that the prediction of his death had come; wild olive, because that was sacred to Heracles, as having been brought by him from the land of the Hyperboreans (Pind. *Ol.* iv. 13).

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Hera. I have said
What thou must do, or nevermore be called
My son, but seek another father for thee.

Hyllos. Ah me! once more. And dost thou bid me,
father,
To be thy slayer and thy murderer?

Hera. Not so bid I; but of the ills I bear,
To be the one great healer, strong to save.

Hyllos. And how can I work health by burning thee?

Hera. If this thou fearest, do at least the rest. [1210

Hyllos. I shall not grudge to bear thy body there.

Hera. And wilt thou heap the pyre I bade thee heap?

Hyllos. All but the touching it with these my hands:
In all things else my labour shall not fail.

Hera. That, then, shall be enough. But add for me
One little favour to these greater ones.

Hyllos. Though it be very great, it shall be done.

Hera. Thou knowest that maiden, child of Eurytos?

Hyllos. Thou speakest, so I guess, of Iole? 1220

Hera. E'en so. And this I charge thee, O my son,
When I am dead, if thou wilt reverence show,
Be mindful of the oath thou now hast sworn,
And take her as thy wife.¹ Rebel thou not;
Nor let another take, instead of thee,
One who has clung so closely to my side;
But thou thyself, my son, make her thy wife.
Obey me, for to trust in greater things,
And then, in small, distrust, this cancels quite
The former boon.

Hyllos. [*Aside.*] Ah me! To vent one's wrath
On one so vexed is wrong. Yet who can bear
To see him in this mood?

¹ Revolting as this element in the drama is to our feelings, the thought which seems to underlie it is, that the coming apotheosis of Heracles removed him from the normal conditions of human life, and cancelled the relationship which, even to the Greek mind, would have made such a union horrible.

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Hera. Thou speakest then
As meaning not to do the things I say.

Hyllos. Nay, who could choose a wife who guilty
stands,
She, and she only, of my mother's death,
And that thou, father, art as now thou art ?
Who could do this, unless the fiends had laid
The spell of madness on him ? Better 'twere
For me to die, my father, than to live
With worst foes dwelling.

Hera. This boy, it seems, denies
What I in death have asked for. But a curse
From God awaits thee, if thou disobey. 1240

Hyllos. Too soon, 'twould seem, thou 'lt shew how wild
thou art.

Hera. Yes ; thou hast roused me when the ill was
lulled.

Hyllos. Woe's me ! I stand as one in much perplexed.

Hera. Yes, for thou dar'st thy father disobey.

Hyllos. But must I learn, my father, godless deeds ?

Hera. No godless deed, if so thou glad my heart.

Hyllos. And dost thou bid me do it in full earnest ?

Hera. Yea, even so ; I call the Gods to witness.

Hyllos. Then will I do, as in the sight of God,
What thou dost ask, and will refuse no more ;
I shall not shew as base, obeying thee. 1250

Hera. Thou endest well ; and add, my son, this boon,
And quickly, ere some fresh convulsive throb
Or dart of pain comes on me, place me there,
Upon the pyre. Come quick, and lift me up.
This is his rest who lies before you here,
His last, last end.

Hyllos. Nay, nothing hinders now
Our doing this, since thou, my father, bidd'st,
And so constrainest us to do thy will.

Hera. Come then, ere once again

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

The evil stirs in its might.
Come, heart strong to restrain,
Putting a curb on thy lips,
Wrought of the steel and the stone. 1260
Cease from thy wailing, as one
About to accomplish a task
Unwelcome, yet fruitful in joy.
Farewell, friends, faithful and true,
*Grant me your pardon for this ;
*But the Gods . . . oh pardon them not,
*For the deeds that are ever being done,
Who, being and bearing the name
Of Fathers, look on such wrong.

Chor. What cometh no man may know, 1270
What is is piteous for us,
Base and shameful for Them,
And for him who endureth this woe,
Above all that live hard to bear.

Hyllos. [*To Chorus.*] And thou, O maiden, within,
Fail not in aught that is right,
Seeing great and terrible deaths,
Many and strange forms of woe,
And nothing which Zeus works not.

AIAS

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

ATHENA.

ODYSSEUS.

AIAS.

TECMESSA, *wife of AIAS.*

TEUCROS, *half-brother of AIAS.*

MENELAOS.

AGAMEMNON.

EURYSAKES, *son of AIAS.*

Attendant.

Herald.

Chorus of Sailors from Salamis.

ARGUMENT.—*Aias, the son of Telamon and Eribea, was mighty among the heroes whom Agamemnon led against Troia, giant-like in stature and in strength; and in the pride of his heart he waxed haughty, and scorned the help of the Gods, and turned away from Pallas Athena when she would have protected him, and so provoked her wrath. Now when Achilles died, and it was proclaimed that his armour should be given to the bravest and best of all the host, Aias claimed them as being indeed the worthiest, and as having rescued the corpse of Achilles from shameful wrong. But the armour (so Athena willed) was given by the chief of the Hellenes not to him but to Odysseus, and, being very wroth thereat, he sought to slay the Atreidæ who had so wronged him, and would have so done, had not Athena darkened his eyes, and turned him against the flocks and herds of the host.*¹

¹ The first outline of the story is found in the *Odyssey* (xi. 543), where Odysseus relates how even in Hades the soul of Aias dwelt apart, and when it recognised him, deigned not to answer him a word, but turned back haughtily to the darkness.

A I A S

SCENE.—*Tents of Aias on the shore, near Ilion; a low underwood in the background; and the sea seen in the distance*

Athena. [*Speaking as from the sky, unseen by ODYSSEUS.*]
 I see thee, son of Lartios, ever more
 Seeking to seize some moment of attack
 Against thy foes; and now, I find thee here,
 Where by the ships the tents of Aias rise,
 (His ranks the last in order,)¹ hunting out
 And measuring the steps but newly stamped,
 That thou may'st see if he is now within,
 Or stays without. And thou art onward led,
 As by the scent of keen Laconian hound;²
 For there, within, the man may now be found,
 With drops of sweat on head and slaughtering hands;¹⁰
 And thou no longer needest so to peer
 Within the gate; but tell me why thou show'st
 Such zeal, that thou may'st learn from one who knows.

Odys. O voice, of all Divine Ones dear to me,
 Athena's, clear, though Thou remain unseen,
 I hear thy speech, and catch it in my soul
 As though it were some bronze Tyrsenian³ trump;

¹ The tents of Odysseus, as described in the *Iliad* (xi. 8), were in the centre of the crescent-shore, between Sigeion and Rhœteion, those of Aias and Achilles at the two extremities.

² The dogs of Sparta, and specially those of Taygetos, were proverbial for their speed and keenness of scent from the days of Pindar (*Fr.* 83) to those of Virgil (*Georg.* iv. 405).

³ The Tyrsenians, or Tyrrhenians (identified here with the Etrurians), had the repute of being the first inventors of bronze, and the trumpet so named had a wide, bell-shaped mouth. Comp. *Æsch. Eumen.* 567.

AIAS

And now full clear Thou saw'st me wheeling round
My steps against a man I count my foe,
Aias, the bearer of the mighty shield.¹

For he it is, and no one else, that I 20
Long while have tracked; for he this very night
Hath wrought a work mysterious, if indeed
'Tis he hath done it, for as yet we know
Nought clearly, but are wandering in our search.
And I of my free will have yoked myself
To bear this toil; for 'twas but now we found
Our captured flocks destroyed, by man's hand slain,
And with them too the guardians of the herd;
And every one imputes the deed to him;
And then a scout, who saw him there alone,
The fields o'erleaping with a blood-stained sword, 30
Told me, and showed it all. And I forthwith
Rush on his track; and now in part I guess
By signs and tokens, and in part am struck
With sore amaze, and learn not where he is.
And now Thou comest here most seasonably,
For I, in all things past or yet to come,
Am guided by the wisdom of thine hand.

Athena. I knew it, O Odysseus, and I came,
Long since, a ready helper in thy hunt.

Odys. And I, dear Mistress, do I toil aright?

Athena. Know this, the deeds were done by this man's
hand.

Odys. To what rash purpose stretched he forth his hand?

Athena. Vexed sore about the great Achilles' arms. [⁴⁰

Odys. But why this raid upon our flocks and herds?

Athena. He thinks it is your blood that stains his hand.

Odys. What? Was his purpose against Argives aimed?

Athena. And he had done it, had I failed to watch.

Odys. Whence came this daring mood, this rashness wild?

¹ The epithet by which the son of Telamon was distinguished from the other Aias, the son of Oileus.

AIAS

Athena. 'Gainst you, by night, alone, with guile he sallies.

Odys. What? Did he come, and reach his destined spot?

Athena. Yea, at the gates of the two chiefs he stood.

Odys. And what restrained the hand that craved for blood? 50

Athena. I held him back from that accursed joy,
Casting strange glamour o'er his wandering eyes,
And turned him on the flocks, and where with them
The herds of captured oxen press in crowds,
Not yet divided. And on these he falls,
And wrought fell slaughter of the horned kine,
Smiting all round; and now it seemed to him
That he did slay the Atreidæ with his hand,
Now this, now that, of other generals.
And I still urged the wild and moon-struck man
With fresh access of madness, and I cast
An evil net around him. After this, 60
When he had ceased that slaughter, binding fast
The oxen that still lived, and all the flocks,
He leads them to his dwelling, counting them
No troop of horned cattle, but of men;
And now within he flouts his prisoners.
And I will show thee this disease full clear,
That thou may'st see and tell the Argives all.
But stay thou here, and fear not; think thou not
The man will prove an evil chance to thee;
For I will turn his eyes' clear sight aside, 70
And keep them back from looking on thy face.
Ho there, [*To AIAS.*] I bid thee come, who bindest now
The captive bands with fetters. Thee I call,
O Aias: forward, to thy dwelling's front.

Odys. What dost thou, O Athena? Call him not

Athena. Wilt not be still, and 'scape the coward's shame?

AIAS

Odys. Nay, by the Gods! but let him stay within.

Athena. What dost thou fear? Was he not strong before?

Odys. Always my foe, and more so now than ever.

Athena. Is it not sweetest scorn to scorn our foes?

Odys. Enough for me that this man stays within.

Athena. Dost fear so much to see a madman's face?

Odys. Nay, were he sane, I should not shun him then.

Athena. Though thou be near, he will not see thee now

Odys. How so, if he the same eyes has to see?

Athena. Know, I will darken even clearest eyes.

Odys. When a God worketh, all is possible.

Athena. Hush, then, and stay where now thou tak'st thy stand.

Odys. I'll stay then; yet I fain would be away.

Athena. [*To AIAS.*] Ho, there, O Aias, once again I call.

Why honourest thou so little thine ally?

90

Enter AIAS from his tent, with a blood-stained scourge in his hand.

Aias. Hail, O Athena, hail, O child of Zeus!

Well art Thou come, and I with golden spoils

Will deck thy shrine for this my glorious raid.

Athena. Thou speakest well. But tell me this, I pray, Is thy sword red with blood of Argive host?

Aias. Well may I boast, and I deny it not.

Athena. Did'st thou against the Atreidæ arm thy hand?

Aias. Yea. Nevermore shall they do Aias wrong.

Athena. The men are dead, if I thy meaning catch.

Aias. Yea, dead; now let them carry off my arms. ¹⁰⁰

Athena. So be it; but that son of Lartios, What is his plight? Has he escaped thy hand?

Aias. That scoundrel fox! Dost ask me where he is?

Athena. E'en so. I mean Odysseus, thy chief foe.

Aias. He, O my Mistress, sits a prisoner there,

AIAS

My choicest spoil. I seek not yet his death.

Athena. What wilt thou do first, what advantage gain?

Aias. First he, bound to the pillar in the court. . . .

Athena. What ill wilt thou on that poor wretch inflict?

Aias. . . . His back all bleeding with the scourge,
shall die. 110

Athena. Do not, I pray, such outrage wreak on him.

Aias. In other things, Athena, have thy way :
But he this penalty, nought else, shall pay.

Athena. Since this thy joy then, to it with a will :
Spare not a jot of all thy soul desires.

Aias. I go to work. And Thou, I charge Thee, still
Be with me, helper true, as now Thou art.

[Goes back to his tent.]

Athena. Thou see'st, Odysseus, all the might of Gods,
How great it is. Whom found'st thou than this man
With keener foresight, or with better gifts,
To do what seemed most fitting for the time? 120

Odys. I know of no man, and I pity him,
So wretched now, although mine enemy,
So tied and harnessed to an evil fate,
And thinking that it touches me as well ;
For this I see, that we, all we that live,
Are but vain phantoms, shadows fleeting fast.

Athena. Do thou, then, seeing this, refrain thy tongue
From any lofty speech against the Gods,
Nor boast thyself, though thou excel in strength
Or weight of stored-up wealth. All human things 130
A day lays low, a day lifts up again ;
But still the Gods love those of ordered soul,
And hate the evil.

Chor. I am full glad, O son of Telamon,¹

¹ It adds to the interest of this and many other passages of the play to remember how closely Salamis was identified by the Athenians with their own history. One of the Attic tribes was named after Aias. Solon of Peisistratos was said to have inserted a verse in the *Iliad* (ii. 558), making him an ally of the Athenians.

AIAS

Whose island home is sea-girt Salamis,
 When all is well with thee ;
 But when the stroke of Zeus, or evil speech
 Of all the Danaï comes on thee full fierce,
 Then have I great dismay,
 And, like a fluttering dove, look on in fear ; 140
 For lo ! this night just o'er,
 Great clamours vex our souls,
 Sprung from the evil bruit
 That thou, upon the plain where all our steeds
 Leap wildly to and fro,
 Rushing, hast slain the Danaï's spoil of flocks,
 All that was left them, taken by the spear,
 With sharp and glittering steel.
 Such whispered words of guile
 Odysseus into all men's ears doth pour,
 And men believe his speech ; 150
 For now he speaks what is too credible,
 And he who hears rejoiceth more and more
 [Than he who told the tale,]
 Mocking at these thy woes.
 For if one take his aim at lofty souls
 He scarce can miss his mark ;
 But one who should at me his slander dart,
 Would fail to gain belief ;
 For envy ever dogs the great man's steps ;
 Yet men of low estate,
 Apart from mightier ones,
 Are but poor towers of strength.
 Still with the great the mean man prospers best, 160

The noblest families of the Eupatrids claimed descent from him. Before the battle of Salamis the Athenians invoked the help of Aias and Telamon, and, after their victory, dedicated their first-fruits to the former (Herod. viii. 64, 121). So, in this tragedy, the sailors of Aias are called sons of Erectheus, *i.e.*, Athenians (202). They crave for a sight of Athens (i. 221). Aias bids the Athenians, as well as his own people, a solemn farewell.

AIAS

And by the small the great maintains his cause ;
 But those, the fools and blind,
 'Tis vain to teach by words.
 By such as these thou art beclamoured now,
 And we can naught avail,
 Apart from thee, O king, to ward the blow.
 But, since they dread thine eye, like wild birds' flock
 Fluttered with fear at sight of eagle strong,
 Perchance, should'st thou confront them suddenly,
 They, hushed and dumb, would crouch.

170

STROPHE

Was it that Artemis, the child of Zeus,¹
 Before whose Tauric altar bleed the bulls,
 (O rumour terrible ! O source of shame !)
 Had sped thee forth against the people's herds,
 The oxen, shared of all ?

Was it for victory that brought no fruit ?
 Or was She robbed of glorious spoils of war ?

Was it for stricken deer
 She gained no votive gifts ?

Or Enyalios,² in his coat of mail,
 Did he find cause of blame,
 As sharing war with thee,
 And so revenged his wrong
 In stratagems of night ?

180

ANTISTROPHE

For never yet, O son of Telamon,

¹ In two legends of the Homeric cycle Artemis appeared as punishing scorn and slight. She sent the Calydonian boar because Æneus had not sacrificed to her (*Il.* ix. 533). She demanded the sacrifice of Iphigeneia because Agamemnon had slain a consecrated stag. The name *Tauropola* contained a twofold allusion—to Tauris, as the home of the wild, orgiastic worship paid to her, and to the bulls (*tauroi*) which were sacrificed in it.

² Enyalios, analogous in attributes to Ares, and often identified with him, was one of the tutelary deities of Salamis, and, at Athens, the Polemarch Archon offered an annual sacrifice to him and Artemis.

AIAS

Had'st thou so wandered from thy reason's path,
 Falling on flocks and herds;
 By will of Gods, perchance, the evil comes;
 But, Zeus and Phœbos, turn,
 Turn ye aside the Argives' tale of shame!
 But if the mighty kings with subtle craft
 Forge idle tales of thee,
 Or he who draws his birth
 From that pernicious stock of Sisyphos,¹
 Bear not, oh, bear not, king,
 That tale of foulest shame,
 Still looking idly thus
 Upon thy sea-washed tents.

190

EPODE

But rise from this thy seat, where all too long
 *Thou stay'st, in rest that brings the ills of strife,
 Fresh kindling Heaven's fierce wrath;
 And so the haughtiness of those thy foes
 Speeds on unshrinking as in forest glades
 Where the wind gently blows,
 While all, with chattering tongues,
 Speak words of woe and shame,
 And sorrow dwells with me.

Enter TECMESSA from the tent.

Tec. O ye who comrades sailed in Aias' ship,
 Sprung from the ancient race
 Who claim the old Erectheus as their sire,²
 We, who afar from home
 Watch over him, yon child of Telamon,
 Have sorrows in good store;
 For now the dread, the great, the mighty one,

¹ In the post-Homeric legends Anticleia, the wife of Laertes, or Lartios, had been loved by Sisyphos, the craftiest of all men, before her marriage, and Odysseus was his child and not her husband's.

² "Who claim . . ." *sc.*, who are true citizens of Attica.

AIAS

Aias, with tempest wild, lies smitten sore.

Chor. What change hath night then brought

*From fair and prosperous state?

210

Child of Teleutas old, of Phrygia,

Speak thou, and tell thy tale;

For mighty Aias loves and honours thee,

His captive and his bride:

Thou wilt not speak as one that knoweth not.

Tec. How shall I speak what is unspeakable?

For thou wilt learn a sorrow sharp as death:

Our Aias, noble, brave,

His soul to madness stung,

Was brought to shame this night.

Such slaughter wrought by him,

His victims dripping blood,

May'st thou behold i' the tent.

220

Chor. Ah, what the news thou bring'st

Of him the fiery one,

Intolerable, and yet inevitable,

By the great Danai's chiefs spread far and wide,

Which rumour magnifies.

Ah me! the fate that cometh on I fear;

Our chief will die the gazing-stock of all,

Having, with frenzied hand

And dark and glittering sword,

Slaughtered the oxen's herd

And those that kept the steeds.

230

Tec. Ah me! Thence, thence he came,

Bringing the flock in chains;

Of part upon the ground he cut the throats,

Part asunder he smote,

Through the chine cleaving them:

And taking two white-footed rams,

From one he cuts the head,

And tears out its tongue from the roots;

And one to a column he binds,

240

AIAS

And seizing a driver's rein,
He smites with shrill re-echoing, doubled thong,
Venting vile words of shame,
Which God, not man, had taught.

Chor. Now is it time one should hide
One's face in the shrouding veil,
And stealthily creep out of sight,
Or sitting on swift rower's bench,
Give way to the sea-crossing ship ;

250

Such are the threats the Atreidæ ply in their wrath,
And I fear, lest smitten with him,
Whom a terrible fate holds fast,
I suffer, like him, stoned to death.

Tec. 'Tis so no more ; for like the wild south-west,
Without the lightning's flash,
He now is lulled to rest ;
And now, in his right mind,
New form of grief is his ;

For to look out on ills that are one's own,
In which another's hand has had no share,
This bringeth sharpest woe.

260

Chor. If he has rest he sure will prosper well.
Slight count we make of ills already gone.

Tec. Which would'st thou choose, if one should give
thee choice,

Or vexing friends, thyself to feel delight,
Or sharing common griefs to mourn with them ?

Chor. The double evil, lady, is the worse.

Tec. We then, though mad no longer, suffer more.

Chor. How say'st thou this ? I know not what thou
say'st.

270

Tec. That man, when he was in his dire disease,
Himself rejoiced in all the ills he did,
But vexed our souls that reason still obeyed ;
But now, when lulled and calmed from that attack,
He is sore haunted with a troublous grief,

AIAS

And we with him are suffering nothing less.
Have we not here a twofold ill for one ?

Chor. I own it also, and I fear lest stroke
Smite him from God. How else, if he, though cured,
Is just as far from joy as when diseased ? 289

Tec. So stands it, and 'tis right that thou should'st
know.

Chor. How did the evil first swoop down on him ?
Tell it to us who grieve at thy mischance.

Tec. Thou shalt learn all, as one who shares our woe :
For he, at dead of night, when evening's lamps
No longer burnt, his two-edged sword in hand,
Sought to go out along the lonely paths ;
And I rebuke him, saying, "What is this
Thou dost, O Aias ? Why unbidden go
On this thy emprise, nor by the heralds called,
Nor hearing voice of trump ? Lo ! all the host 299
Is sleeping sound." And he, with fewest words,
The well-worn saw, made answer, "Woman, know
That silence is a woman's noblest part."

And, hearing this, I ceased. Then he alone
Rushed forth, and what passed there I cannot tell :
But then he came within, and brought with him
Oxen, and shepherd-dogs, and fleecy flocks.
Some he beheaded, some he clove in twain,
Cutting their throats, and some, fast bound in chains,
He mocked, as they were men, upon the flocks
Venting his fury ; and, at last, he rushed 300
Out through the door, and with a phantom there
He bandied words, against the Atreidæ some,
And some against Odysseus, laughing much
That he had paid them to the full in scorn ;
And thence once more within the tent he leapt,
And, long while after, scarce regains his sense.
And when he saw the tent with slaughter filled,
He smote his head and groaned : and, falling down,

AIAS

He sat among the fallen carcases
 Of that great slaughter of the flocks and herds,
 Tearing his hair by handfuls with his nails. 310
 And for a long, long time he speechless sat ;
 And then with those dread words he threatened me,
 Unless I told him all the woeful chance,
 And asked me of the plight in which he stood ;
 And I, my friends, in terror told him all,
 All that I knew of all that he had done.
 And he forthwith cried out a bitter cry,
 Such as till now I never heard from him ;
 For ever did he hold such loud lament,
 Sure sign of one with coward heart and base ; 320
 And holding back from shrill and wailing cries,
 Would groan with deep, low muttering, like a bull :
 But now, thus fallen on an evil chance,
 Tasting nor food, nor drink, among the herds
 Slain with the sword, he sits in silent calm,
 And looks like one on some dire mischief bent.
 [Such are the words he utters, such his grief.]
 But ye, my friends, (for therefore came I forth,)
 Come in, and give us help, if help ye can.
 For men like him still yield to words of friends. 330
Chor. Dread things, Tecmessa, old Teleutas' child,
 Thou tell'st us, that our chief is mad with woe.
Aias. [*Within the tent.*] Woe, woe is me !
Tec. Yet more, 'twould seem ; or heard ye not the cry
 Which Aias just now uttered ?
Aias. [*Within.*] Woe is me !
Chor. Our chief, it seems, is either frenzied now,
 Or grieving o'er the frenzies of the past.
Aias. [*Within.*] My son, my son !
Tec. Ah wretched me ! he calls, Eurysakes, 340
 For thee What means he ? Where art thou ? Ah me !
Aias. [*Within.*] I call for Teucros. Will he evermore
 Go forth to spoil while I am perishing ?

AIAS

Chor. He now seems calm enough. But ope the door ;
Perchance some sense of shame may come on him,
Seeing even me.

Tec. [*Throwing the tent door open, and disclosing AIAS
sitting with carcasses of sheep and oxen round
him.*] Behold I open it,

And thou may'st see his deeds, and how he fares.

Aias. Ah, sailor friends! alone of all my friends,
Alone abiding in your steadfast law, 350
Behold how great a surge of blood-flecked foam
Now whirls around me.

Chor. [*To TECMESSA.*] Ah me! Thou dost too true a
witness bear :
His deeds show clearly that his sense is gone.

Aias. O race, well versed in all the sailor's art,
Who camest, plying still the seaman's oar,
Thee, thee alone I see as help in grief; 360
Yet kill me, kill, I pray.

Chor. Hush! speak not so, nor, curing ill with ill,
Make sorrow's weight yet greater than it is.

Aias. Me, the bold, the brave-hearted,
Fearless in fight with the foe,
Thou see'st me show the prowess of mine hand
On beasts unformidable.

Ah! woe is me for the shame,

The scorn that falls on me.

Tec. Ah, my lord Aias, speak not thus, I pray.

Aias. Away with thee! What? Wilt thou not with-
draw? 370

Ai! ai!

Tec. Oh! by the Gods, give way, and be advised.

Aias. Ah! woe is me, who let the cursed ones
Slip from my hands, and falling on the herds
Of horned oxen, and those noble flocks,
Shed their dark gore.

Chor. Whydost thou grieve o'er what is gone and past?

AIAS

These things are so, and cannot be undone.

Aias. O thou whose eye sees all things evermore,
Tool of all evil, child of Lartios, 380
Of all the host the foulest scoundrel-knave,
Surely thou laughest much in thy delight.

Chor. It is through God that man or laughs or mourns.

Aias. Would I could see him, smitten as I am.
Ah me! ah me!

Chor. Speak nothing vauntingly.
Dost thou not see what evil plight thou'rt in?

Aias. O Zeus! great Father of my sires of old,¹
Would that I might destroy
That crafty, scoundrel foe,
And those two kings that reign in partnership, 390
And then myself might die.

Tec. When thou pray'st this, pray that I die with thee :
What profits it to live, when thou art dead?

Aias. O dark, thou art my light,
O gloom to me most clear,
Take me, yea, take me as your habitant :
Take me, for neither to the race of Gods,
Nor yet of men enduring but a day 400
Can I, as worthy, look
For any help in need,
But She, the child of Zeus,
Goddess of mightiest power,
Mocks at me unto death ;
Where from her presence 'scape,
Where wandering shall I dwell ?
*Ah, friends ! if all things fail,
*For me, and those most near,
And we a dream pursue,
Then should the host, as spear by both hands swayed,
Smite me with one fell stroke.

¹ Æacos, the grandfather of Aias, was the son of Zeus and Ægina.

AIAS

Tec. Ah ! wretched me ! that one so good should
speak 410

Such words, which once he had not dared to think !

Aias. O ye paths of the wave !

O ye caves by the sea !

O thou glade by the shore !

Long time, long time my feet

On Troïa's soil ye kept ;

But never, never more

Breathing the breath of life ;

Let the wise hear and heed.

O streams, Scamandros' streams

Hard by, to Argives kind,

Never again shall ye see 420

This man who calls to you now,

Like whom . . . (though great the vaunt,

Yet will I speak it out)

In all the army that from Hellas came,

Troïa no hero found :

Yet now I lie in this dishonoured plight.

Chor. I know not how to check thee in thy speech,
Nor yet permit it, whelmed in ills like these.

Aias. Ai ! ai ! who e'er had dreamt my name should
be 430

So clear a sign and symbol for my woe ?¹

For now 'tis mine to groan this "Ai, ai" forth,

Twice, yea, and thrice, such ills have come on me,

Whose father, head of all the conquering host,

Brought the chief trophies from fair Ida's shore,

And home returned, with highest glory crowned ;

And I, his son, to that same Troïa come

With no less power, nor working with my hands

¹ The irony with which Aias thus finds an omen in his own name becomes all the more bitter when we remember that, in the popular tradition, it was derived from *aietos*, the kingly eagle, which had appeared to Heracles, as an omen that Zeus had granted his prayer for Telamon, and after which, therefore, Telamon's son was named.

AIAS

Less mighty deeds, am left to perish here,
 Dishonoured by the Argives : yet I think
 I know thus much, that had Achilles lived
 To give his arms as prize of valiant deeds,
 No one would then have seized them in my stead.
 But now the Atreidæ got them for a man
 Crafty in soul, and this my strength despised ;
 And were it not my eyes and mind had rushed
 Wildly away from will, they had not lived
 To give their votes against another man.
 But now the virgin child of Zeus, with eyes
 Of fearful brightness, when I stretched my hands 450
 Against them, sent a frenzied madness on me,
 So that I stained my hands with these poor beasts ;
 And they, escaped in safety, mock at me :
 Not with my will was this, but if a God
 Should smite, the worse may 'scape the better man.
 And now what course is right for me, to whom
 The Gods are clearly foes, and all the host
 Of Hellas hates me, and these outspread plains
 And Troïa are mine enemies ? Shall I,
 Quitting my seat and sea-side anchorage,
 Leave the Atreidæ by themselves alone, 460
 And cross the Ægæan waters to my home ?
 But then, how shall I look him in the face,
 My father Telamon ? How will he bear
 To see me stript, without my valour's prize,
 When he himself won glory's noblest crown ?
 That shame is past all bearing. Shall I go
 Against the Troïans' fort, and fighting there,
 Alone with them alone, do some brave deed,
 And then at last gain death ? But thus should I
 Gladden my foes, the Atreidæ. Nay, not so :
 I must seek out some perilous emprise, 470
 To show my father that I sprang from him,
 In nature not faint-hearted. It is shame

AIAS

For any man to wish for length of life,
 Who, wrapt in troubles, knows no change for good.
For what delight brings day still following day,
Or bringing on, or putting off our death ?
 I would not rate that man as worth regard
 Whose fervour glows on vain and empty hopes :
 But either noble life or noble death
 Becomes the gently born. My say is said. 480

Ghor. And none will say, O Aias, that thou speak'st
 As one who talks by rote, but from thine heart :
 Yet cease, we pray thee ; leave such thoughts as these,
 And let thy friends control thy soul's resolve.

Tec. My master Aias, greater ill is none
 To mortals given than lot of servitude ;
 And I was sprung from free-born father, strong,
 If any was in Phrygia, in his wealth :
 And now I am a slave, for so it pleased
 The Gods and thy right hand ; and therefore, since 490
 I share thy bed, I care for thee and thine.
 And now I pray, by Zeus who guards our hearth,
 And by the couch where thou hast slept with me,
 Deem it not right, in bondage leaving me,
 That I should hear hard words from those thy foes ;
 For should'st thou die, and dying leave me lone,
 Be sure that I upon that self-same day,
 Dragged by the Argives with a harsh constraint,
 With this thy son must eat a bond-slave's bread ;
 And some one of my masters bitter words 500
 Will speak with scorn,—“ Behold the concubine
 Of Aias who excelled the host in might !
 What bondage now she bears, in place of lot
 That all did envy ! ” This will some one say,
 And Fate pursue me, while for thee and thine
 Are basest words like these. For very shame
 Leave not thy father in his sad old age ;
 For shame leave not thy mother, feeble grown

AIAS

With many years, who oftentimes prays the Gods
That thou may'st live and to thy home return :
Pity, O king, thy boy, and think if he,
Deprived of childhood's nurture, live bereaved,
Beneath unfriendly guardians, what sore grief
'Thou, in thy death, dost give to him and me ;
For I have nothing now on earth save thee
To which to look ; for thou hast swept away
My country with thy spear, and other fate
Has taken both my mother and my sire
To dwell, as dead, in Hades. What to me
Were country in thy stead, or what were wealth ?
For I in thee find all deliverance.

610

Yea, think of me too. Still the good man feels,
Or ought to feel, the memory of delight ;
For gracious favours still do favour win ;
But if a man forget the good received,
His soul no more wears stamp of gentle birth.

620

Chor. I would, O Aias, thou could'st pity feel,
As I do. Then would'st thou approve her words.

Aias. Great praise shalt she have from me, if she dare
Fully to do the task appointed her.

Tec. Lo ! Aias dear, I will obey in all.

Aias. Bring then thy child to me that I may see
him. 530

Tec. In very fear but now I sent him forth.

Aias. In these late troubles ? Or what meanest thou ?

Tec. Lest he, poor child, should meet with thee and
die.

Aias. That would have been fit pastime for my Fate.

Tec. But I took care against that fate to guard.

Aias. I praise thy deed, and prudence which thou
showed'st.

Tec. What service then could I next render thee ?

Aias. Give me to speak with him, and look on him.

Tec. He is hard by, in our attendants' care.

AIAS

Aias. Why this delay ? Why comes he not at once ? ⁵⁴⁰

Tec. Ho, boy ! Thy father calls. Come hither, thou,
Who chancest now to guide him with thy hands.

Aias. Speak'st thou to one who comes, or fails to hear ?

Tec. Behold, this servant brings him in to thee.

Enter Attendant, bringing EURYSAKES.

Aias. Lift him, then, lift him here. He will not shrink,
Beholding all this slaughter newly wrought,
If he be rightly named his father's son :

But we to these his father's savage ways
Must break him in, and make him like in soul.

O boy, may'st thou be happier than thy sire,
In all things else be like him. And not bad
Would'st thou be then. And yet thy lot e'en now
Doth move my envy, that thou feelest nought
Of all these evils. Sweetest life is found

In those unconscious years ere yet thou know
Or joy or sorrow. When thou com'st to this,
Then thou must show thy breeding to thy foes,
What son of what a father : but till then,

In gentle breezes grow, and rear thy life

A joy to this thy mother. And I know

That none of all the Achæan host will dare
Insult thee with foul scorn, though I be gone ;

Such a stout guardian will I leave for thee

In Teucros, still unsparing for thy need,

Though now far off he hunts our enemies.

And ye, who bear the shield, my sailor band,

On you in common this request I lay ;

Give him this message from me, home to take

This boy, and show him there to Telamon,

And to my mother, Eribœa named,

That he may feed their age for evermore,

[Till they too enter the abode of Death ;]

And these my arms no umpires—no, nor yet

AIAS

That plague of mine—shall to Achæans give ;
 But thou, my son, Eurysakes, be true
 To that thy name, and holding by the belt
 Well wrought, bear thou the sevenfold shield unhurt ;
 But all my other arms with me shall lie
 Entombed. And now, take thou this boy indoors
 And close the tent, and shed no wailing tears
 Here in the front. A woman still must weep. 580
 Close up the opening quickly : skilful leech
 Mutters no spell o'er sore that needs the knife.

Chor. I tremble as I hear thy eagerness ;
 For I like not this sharp, keen-whetted speech.

Tec. Ah ! Aias, lord, what deed dost thou intend ?

Aias. Ask not ; inquire not. Self-command is good.

Tec. Ah ! my heart fails me. Now, by this thy son,
 And all the Gods, I pray thee, leave us not.

Aias. Thou vexest me too much. What ? Know'st
 thou not

That I no more am debtor to the Gods

590

That I should do them service ?

Tec. Hush ! oh, hush !

Aias. Speak thou to those that hear thee.

Tec. Wilt not thou

Be soothed, and hearken ?

Aias. Thou dost speak too much.

Tec. Yea, for I fear, O prince.

Aias. Quick ! lead her in.

[Sailors take TECMESSA, EURYSAKES, and the
 Attendant to the women's tent.]

Tec. [From the tent.] Oh, by the Gods, relent thou.

Aias. Thou dost seem

A foolish thing to purpose, if thou think'st

At such a time as this to school my mood.

[Exit, into his tent.]

STROPHE I

Chor. O glorious Salamis !

AIAS

Thou dwellest, blest within thy sea-girt shores,
Admired of all men still ;
While I, poor fool, long since abiding here 600
 *In Ida's grassy mead,
 *Winter and summer too,
*Dwell, worn with woe, through months innumerable,
Still brooding o'er the fear of evil things,
 That I ere long shall pass
To shades of Hades terrible and dread.

ANTISTROPHE I

And now our Aias comes,
Fresh troubler, hard to heal, (ah me ! ah me !)
And dwells with madness sore, 610
Which God inflicts ; him thou of old did'st send
Mighty in battle fierce ;
But now in lonely woe
Wandering, great sorrow he to friends is found,
And the high deeds of worthiest praise of old,
 Loveless to loveless souls,
Are with the Atreidæ fallen, fallen low. 620

STROPHE II

And, lo ! his mother, worn with length of days,
And white with hoary age,
When she shall hear his frenzied soul's disease,
With wailing, wailing loud,
Will she, ill-starred one, cry, nor pour the strain
Of nightingale's sad song,
But shriller notes will utter in lament, 630
And on her breast will fall
The smiting of her hands,
And fearful tearing of her hoary hair.

ANTISTROPHE II

For better would he fare in Hades dread,
Who liveth sick in soul,

AIAS

Who, springing from the noblest hero-stock

Of all the Achæans strong,

Abides no longer in his native mood,

But wanders far astray.

640

O wretched father, what a weight of woe,

Thy son's, hast thou to learn,

Which none else yet has borne,

Of all the high Zeus-sprung Æacidæ.

Enter AIAS from his tent, with his sword.

Aias. Time in its long, long course immeasurable,

Both brings to light all hidden things, and hides

What once was seen ; and nothing is there strange

We may not look for : even dreadest oaths

And firm resolves must yield themselves to him.

650

So I, who for a while was stern and hard,

Like steel, oil-dipped, am womanised in tone,

Moved by my wife's fond prayers, whom I am loth

To leave a widow with her orphaned child

Among my foes. But now I go to bathe

Where the fair meadows slope along the shore,

That having washed away my stains of guilt,

I may avert the Goddess's dire wrath ;

And, going where I find a spot untracked

By human foot, may bury this my sword,

Weapon most hateful, digging up the earth

Where none may see it ; but let Hades dark

660

And Night watch o'er it. For from that same hour

When I received it at great Hector's hands,

A gift most deadly, never kindly word

Had I from any Argive ; and most true

Is found the proverb that one hears men say—

“A foe's gifts are as no gifts, profitless.”

So for the future we shall know to yield

Our will to God's, shall learn to reverence

The Atreidæ even. They our rulers are,

AIAS

And we must yield. Why not? The strongest things
 That fright the soul still yield to sovereignty.
 Winters with all their snow-drifts still withdraw 670
 For summer with its fruits; and night's dark orb
 Moves on that day may kindle up its fires,
 Day with its chariot drawn by whitest steeds;
 And blast of dreadest winds will lull to rest
 The groaning ocean; and all-conquering sleep
 Now binds, now frees, and does not hold for aye
 Whom once it seized. And shall not we too learn
 Our lesson of true wisdom? I, indeed,
 Have learnt but now that we should hate a foe
 Only so far as one that yet may love, 680
 And to a friend just so much help I'll give
 As unto one that will not always stay;
 For with most men is friendship's haven found
 Most treacherous refuge. But in this our need
 All shall be well, and thou, O woman, go
 Within, and pray the Gods to grant in full
 What my heart craves for. And do ye, my friends,
 Pay her the self-same honour as to me,
 And charge ye Teucros, should he come, to care
 For me, and show a kindly heart to you.
 For now I go the journey I must take; 690
 And ye, do what I bid you, and perchance
 Ye soon may hear of me, though now my fate
 Is evil, as delivered from all ill. [Exit.

STROPHE

Chor. I thrill with eager desire, I leap for gladness of
 heart,
 Io, Io, O Pan! ¹

¹ The hymn of the Chorus is addressed, first, to Pan as the God of impetuous, exulting joy, and, afterwards, to Apollo as the giver of a calmer and more spiritual gladness. Another reason for their choice is found in the fact that the island Psyttaleia, between Salamis and the mainland, was sacred to him. Thence, in legends

AIAS

O Pan ! O Pan ! O Pan !
 Pan that walketh the waves,
 Come from the snow-beaten heights
 From Kyllene's mountainous ridge.
 Come, O my king, that ledest the dance of the Gods,
 That thou with me may'st thread
 The dance of windings wild,
 Nysian, or Knossian named ; ¹
 For now I needs must dance for very joy.
 And King Apollo, o'er Icarian waves,
 Coming, the Delian God,
 In presence manifest,
 May He be with me gracious evermore.

700

ANTISTROPHE

And Ares, too, hath loosed the dark calamitous spell
 From off these eyes of ours :
 Io, and Io still,
 Once more, and yet once more.
 And now, O Zeus, again
 A day clear, cloudless, fair,
 May dawn upon our ships o'er waves swift-speeding ; ⁷¹⁰
 For Aias rests from grief,
 And now with awe profound,
 Duly worships the Gods
 With meetest sacrifice.
 Time, with great changes, bringeth all things low,
 And never shall the word "impossible"
 Pass from my lips, since now
 Aias from wrath hath turned,
 And the hot mood that 'gainst the Atreidæ raged.

which were fresh in men's memories when Sophocles wrote, he had come forth to help the Athenians at Marathon and Salamis. Kyllene, in Arcadia, was the special home of Pan-worship.

¹ Nysian, like the dances of the *Thiasos* at Nysa, the birthplace of Dionysos ; Knossian, like those at Knossos in Crete, in honour of the bride of Dionysos, Ariadne.

Enter Messenger.

Mess. I wish, my friends, to tell my good news first :
 Teucros is come but now from Mysian crags, 720
 And coming where the generals all were met,
 From all the Argive host foul speech he hears ;
 For hearing of his coming from afar,
 Gathering around him at his head they hurled
 Their words of scorn, here, there, and everywhere,
 Calling him brother of the madman, kin
 Of him who laid his plans against the host,
 And threatening that he should not save himself
 From falling, bruised and mangled, stoned to death. 730
 So far they went that even swords were drawn
 Forth from their scabbards, and were crossed in fight ;
 And when the strife had reached its furthest bounds,
 It ceased with calmer speech of aged men.
 But where is Aias that he too may hear ?
 'Tis right to tell our masters all the truth.

Chor. He is not there within, but now is gone,
 Changed counsels forming for his changing mood.

Mess. Ah me ! Or he who sent me on my way,
 Sent me too late, or I too late have come.

Chor. What then is lacking in thy business here ? 740

Mess. Teucros forbade our chief to pass outside
 His tent, till he himself were present here.

Chor. But he is gone, to best of tempers turned,
 That he may 'scape the anger of the Gods.

Mess. These words of thine are full of foolishness,
 If Calchas be a prophet wise and true.

Chor. What mean'st thou ? What know'st thou of all
 these things ?

Mess. Thus much I know, and chanced, being there,
 to hear ;

For from the council where the rulers sat,
 Calchas alone, withdrawing from the Atreidæ, 750

AIAS

His right hand placing with all kindliness
 In Teucros' hand, urged him by every art,
 For this one day, this very day, to keep
 Our Aias in his tent, nor let him go,
 If he desired to see him yet alive ;
 For that on this day only, so he spake,
 Athena's wrath would vex him. For the seer
 Said that the over-proud and foolish ones
 Fall into sore misfortunes from the Gods,
 When one, who draws his life from human birth,
 Then thinks and feels as he were more than man. 760
 And he, when starting hither from his home,
 Showed himself foolish son of prudent sire ;
 For thus he bade him : " With thy spear, my son,
 Strive thou to win, but win with help of God ! "
 And he replied, in foolish, vaunting speech,
 " My father, with God's help, a man of nought
 Might victory win ; but I, I trust, shall grasp
 Without their aid that glory for myself." 770
 Such boast he uttered ; and a second time,
 When great Athena urged him to the fight,
 And bade him turn his hand against his foes,
 He answered her with words one fears to speak :
 " O queen, stand thou the other Argives near ;
 The tide of battle will not sweep us down."
 With words like these, not thinking as a man
 Should think, he roused the Goddess to fierce wrath ;
 But if he lives this day, with help of God,
 We might be his deliverers. Thus the seer 780
 Spake, and then Teucros gives me this command
 For thee to keep. But if we miss our mark,
 Our lord is lost, or Calchas is not wise.

Ghor. Ah, poor Tecmessa ! child of misery,
 Come thou, and hear what words are these he
 peaks ;
 The knife has touched the quick, and joy is gone.

AIAS

Enter TECMESSA from the tent, with EURYSAKES.

Tec. Why rouse ye me, so lately freed from woe,
Woe very grievous, once again to grieve?

Chor. Hear thou this man, who now has tidings
brought

About our Aias, which I grieve to hear.

790

Tec. Ah me! O man, what say'st thou? Are we lost?

Mess. Of thy estate I know not, but for him
I have small hope, if he is not within.

Tec. Within he is not; so thy words bring woe.

Mess. Teucros doth bid thee keep thy husband safe
Within his tent, nor let him forth alone.

Tec. And where is Teucros? Why does he say this?

Mess. He has but just now come, and says he fears
Lest this departure bring to Aias death.

Tec. Woe, woe is me! From whom did he learn this?

Mess. From Thestor's son, the seer, who says this day,
This very day, brings life or death to him. [800]

Tec. Ah, friends, come help me in my low estate,
And hasten, some, to bring me Teucros here;
Some seek the western bays, and some the east;
Go ye, and search the wanderings of my lord,
So fraught with evil. Well I see it now,
My husband tricked me, and has cast me out
From all his old affection. Ah, my son!
What shall we do? We must not linger here,
But I will onward with all strength I have.
On, hasten we; no time for loitering this,
[Wishing to save a man so bent on death.]

810

Chor. Full ready I, and not in words alone:
Swift action and swift feet shall go with them.

[*Exeunt* TECMESSA, Messenger, and Chorus]

*Aias is seen in the distance by the sea-shore, fixing his
sword in the ground.*

Aias. The slayer stands where sharpest it will pierce,—

AIAS

If one had time to think of that,—the gift
 Of Hector, whom of all men most I loathed,
 And found most hostile. And in Troia's soil,
 Soil of our foes, it stands with sharpened edge,
 Fresh whetted with the stone that wears the steel ;
 And I have fixed it carefully and well
 Where most it favours speedy death for him
 Who standeth here. So far, so good : and first,
 O Zeus, (for this is right,) be kind to me.
 I ask but this, (no mighty boon, I trow,)
 Send some one as a messenger to bear
 The evil news to Teucros, that he first
 May lift my corpse, by this sharp sword transfix'd,
 And that I may not, seen by any foe,
 Before he see me, be to dogs and birds
 Foully cast forth, their quarry and their spoil ;
 So much, O Zeus, I ask Thee ; and I call
 With Thee, great Hermes, guide of all the dead,
 And dweller in the dark, to close mine eyes
 Kindly, with one swift, unconvulsive spring
 Piercing my heart with this same sword of mine ;
 And those, the Ever-virgin Ones, I call,
 Erinnyes dread that see all human deeds,
 Swift-footed, that they mark how I am slain
 By yon Atreidæ ; may they seize on them,
 Doers of evil, with all evil plagues
 And uttermost destruction, as they now
 See me destroyed [with suicidal hand,
 So let them fall by dearest kindred slain.]
 Come swift Erinnyes, vengeful, glut yourselves
 (Yea, spare them not,) upon the host they rule.
 Thou Sun, whose chariot in the heaven's high path
 Rides on in glory, when Thou see'st the land
 Owned by my fathers, draw thy golden reins,
 And tell all these my sorrows, and my doom,
 To mine old father, and my mother lorn ;

AIAS

Ah ! when she hears, poor wretch, the evil news 850
 Through all the city, great and bitter cries
 Will issue from her lips. But not for me
 Is time for vain lament. The work must now
 Begin more swiftly. Come, and look on me,
 O Death, O Death !—and yet in yonder world
 I shall dwell with thee, speak enough with thee ;
 And Thee I call, thou light of golden day,
 Thou Sun, who drivest on thy glorious car,
 Thee, for this last time, never more again.
 O Light, O sacred land that was my home ;
 O Salamis, where stands my father's hearth, 860
 Thou glorious Athens, with thy kindred race ;
 Ye streams and rivers here, and Troïa's plains,
 To you that fed my life I bid farewell ;
 This last, last word does Aias speak to you ;
 All else I speak in Hades to the dead.

[Falls on his sword, and dies.]

Enter Chorus, in two companies, searching for AIAS.

Semi-Chor. A. Toil upon toil brings toil ;

Whither, ah, whither,

Whither have I not gone ?

And no place knoweth to help. 870

Lo ! lo ! again I hear a sound of fall.

Semi-Chor. B. 'Tis but our mates, the sailors of our ship.

Semi-Chor. A. What say ye then ?

Semi-Chor. B. The whole flank has been tracked
 West of the ships.

Semi-Chor. A. And is there aught discerned ?

Semi-Chor. B. Labour enough, but nothing more to see.

Semi-Chor. A. And yet upon the eastern region's path
 Our chief is clearly nowhere to be found.

Chor. Who, then, will tell me, who

Of fishers loving toil, 880

AIAS

Plying his sleepless task,
 Or who of Nymphs divine,
 That haunt Olympos' height,
 Of which of all the streams
 Where Bosporos flows fast,
 Will tell if they have seen him anywhere,
 Wandering, the vexed in soul ?
 Hard destiny is mine,
 Long tried with weary, toilsome wanderings,
 That still I fail to reach with prosperous course,
 Nor see where now he stays,
 The man o'erwrought with ill.

Enter TECMESSA ; as she advances, she stumbles on the body.

Tec. Woe, woe is me !

Ghor. What cry hard by is that from out the glade ?

Tec. Oh, miserable me !

Ghor. I see that captive bride, the spoil of war,
 Tecmessa, crushed with this o'erwhelming grief.

Tec. I die, I perish ; all is lost, my friends.

Ghor. What, then, has happened ?

Tec. Aias lieth here
 Just slain, his sword within his body buried.

Ghor. Woe, woe for my voyage home !

Woe, woe is me, thou hast slain,

O king, thy shipmate true ;

Ah me, grievous my lot !

Grievous, O woman, thy woe !

Tec. Well may one groan and wail to find him thus.

Ghor. But by whose hands did that ill-starred one die ?

Tec. He, by his own hand, it is plain ; for here
 This sword, firm fixed, on which he fell, gives proof.

Ghor. Woe, woe is me for my grief !

Alone thou wast bleeding to death,

¹ The Mysian Olympos which the Greek dramatists identified with Ida.

None of thy friends near to guard ;
 And I, all deaf and all blind,
 Left thee, neglected, to fall.
 Where, ah ! where does he lie,
 Alas, ill-fated, with ill name of woe ?

910

Tec. Ye may not look on him, but I with robe
 Enfolded round, will hide him utterly ;
 For none who loved him now could have the heart
 To see him still up-panting from his wound,
 At either nostril, blackened gore and blood
 Springing from that self-slaughter. Now, ah me !
 What shall I do ? What friend will lift thee up ?
 And where is Teucros ? How in timeliest need
 Would he now come the body to lay out
 Of this his fallen brother ! O ill-starred
 Aias, who, being what thou wast, has fared
 As now thou farest ; e'en from bitterest foes
 Thou now could'st claim the meed of righteous tears.

920

Chor. O man of many woes, 'twas thine, 'twas thine,
 In stern unbending mood,
 At the fixed hour to work
 Ill doom of boundless griefs ;
 So all night long, till dawn,
 Thou poured'st dire complaint,
 With spirit vexed to death,
 Against the Atreidæ in thy bitter mood.
 Great author of our sorrows was that day,
 When for the arms of great Achilles rose

930

Strife of the brave in fight.

Tec. Ah me ! Ah misery !

Chor. True griefs, I know too well, will pierce the
 heart.

Tec. Ah me ! Ah misery !

Chor. I wonder not, O woman, thou should'st groan
 Yet more, but now of such a friend bereaved.

Tec. Thine 'tis to think ; mine all too well to know.

940

AIAS

Chor. I own it so.

Tec. Ah me ! to what a yoke of bondage, child,
We now draw nigh, what watchers over us !

Chor. Ah ! thou hast spoken now

Of deeds unutterable,

By the Atreidæ stern

Heaped upon this our grief :

But may God ward it off !

Tec. But for the Gods this had not happened so. 950

Chor. Yea, they have wrought a trouble hard to bear.

Tec. Such woe does Pallas, dreaded child of Zeus,
For her Odysseus' sake inflict on us.

Chor. Lo ! the man subtle to dare,

Mocks in the dark of his soul,

And laughs at this frenzy of woe

(Fie on't !) a laugh loud and long,

And with him those who share the name of king,

The Atreidæ, as they hear. 960

Tec. Let them, then, mock and laugh at this man's
woes ;

The time may come when they who did not care

To see him living, in the need of war

May groan that he is dead ; for still the base

In purpose never know the good they have,

Until they lose it. Bitter woe to me

His death has brought, to them good cheer, but joy,

Great joy to him ; for what he sought to gain,

Yea, death that he desired, he now hath won.

[How, then, can they exult in this man's death ?

'Twas for the Gods, and not for them he died.] 970

In empty vaunt, then, let Odysseus boast,

For Aias is beyond them ; but for me

He leaves, departing, wailing and lament.

Enter TEUCROS.

Teu. Woe is me ! Ah, woe !

AIAS

Chor. [*To TEUCRESSA.*] Hush ! for I think I hear our
Teucros cry,

With wailing loud that hits this great woe's mark.

Teu. O best-loved Aias, brother dear to me,
Hast thou, then, fared so ill as rumour holds ?

Chor. Our lord is dead, O Teucros, doubt it not.

Teu. Oh, woe is me ! Woe for my grievous lot ! 980

Chor. At such a pass . . .

Teu. Oh, miserable me !

Chor. Thou well may'st groan.

Teu. O rash and ruthless death !

Chor. Too truly so, O Teucros.

Teu. Woe is me !

What of his child ? Where in all Troïa is he ?

Chor. Alone, within the tents.

Teu. Why bring ye not

With quickest speed the boy, lest any foe

Seize him, as whelp of lonely lioness ?

Go, hasten, work together. All are wont

To treat with scorn the dead that prostrate lie.

[*Some of the Chorus bring in EURYSAKES.*

Chor. And while he lived, O Teucros, thee he charged,
For this his boy to care, as now thou car'st. 990

Teu. Sight of all sights most painful ; of all paths

Path vexing most my spirit, this, which now

My feet have taken, where, O Aias dear,

Still following thee and tracking out thy course,

I learnt thy fate : for lo ! a swift report,

As though some God had spread it, went of thee

Through all the Achæans, that thy death had come ;

And I in woe, and hearing it far off,

1000

Groaned low ; and seeing, perish utterly.

Ah, me ! [*Some of the Chorus, as he speaks, uncover the
body of AIAS.*

Come, lay it bare, that I may see it well,

The whole dread evil. O most ghastly sight,

AIAS

And work of bitter daring, what a woe
 Thou, in thy death, hast sown for me ! Where go,
 Among what men, I who in all thy woes
 Have failed to help thee ? Telamon, I trow,
 My father, and thine too, will welcome me
 With cheerful glances, full of kindly mood, 1010
 Without thee coming ! Can he fail to frown
 Who, e'en when all went well, but seldom smiled
 Too pleasantly on men ? What word of wrath
 Will he now hide ? What evil utter not ?
 Reproaching me as bastard, captive-born,
 Who, in my coward, base unmanliness
 Abandoned thee, O Aias, or in guile,
 That, on thy death, I might thy sceptre wield
 And rule thy house ? Such foul reproach will he,
 Rough in his mood, and vexèd sore with age,
 Vent in his wrath, by trifles light as air
 To fiercest anger kindled. And at last
 I shall be hurled an outcast from my home,¹
 Bearing the name of slave instead of free. 1020
 Such fate awaits me there. In Troïa here
 Many my foes, and few the things that help ;
 And this, all this, thy death hath brought to me.
 What shall I do ? Alas ! how lift thee up
 From this bright sword whose murderous point hath
 brought
 Thee, wretched one, to death ? And did'st thou know
 How Hector thus, though dead, should bring thee low ?
 Now, by the Gods, look ye upon the fate
 Of those two men—how Hector, with the belt
 Which this man gave him, bound to chariot's wheel, 1030
 Was dragged and mangled, on and on, till death ;

¹ The words of Teucros point prophetically to his later history. He left Salamis, according to the legend, because his father drove him from his presence, went to Kypros, and there founded a city, which he named Salamis, in memory of his fatherland.

AIAS

While he who had this sword as Hector's gift,¹
 Brought death upon himself by one fell leap.
 Oh, did some dread Erinnys forge this sword,
 And Hades, stern artificer, that belt ?
 I must needs own the Gods as working this,
 And all things else that come to mortal men ;
 And he who thinks not so, why, let him have
 His own thoughts if he will ; I hold to these.

Chor. Be not too long, but ponder well how best 1040
 Thou may'st inter his body in the tomb,
 And what thou now wilt say ; for, lo ! I see
 A man, his foe, exulting, it may be,
 As evil-doer at the evil done.

Teu. What man of all the host is this thou see'st ?

Chor. 'Tis Menelaos, for whose sake we sailed.

Teu. I see him. Near, he is not hard to know.

Enter MENELAOS, followed by a Herald, and Attendants.

Mene. Ho, there ! I bid thee not to touch this corpse
 With these thy hands, but leave it as it is.

Teu. And why dost thou such big words lavish here ?

Mene. So think I : so thinks he who rules the host. 1050

Teu. Wilt thou not say what ground thou giv'st for
 this ?

Mene. Because we hoped to bring him from his home,
 Ally and friend to all the Achæan host,
 And found him than the Phrygians worser foe,
 Who, plotting death to all the host at once,
 Came on by night that he might slay with sword ;
 And were it not some God had quashed the scheme,
 We should have fallen, and, in shameful plight,
 By chance which now is his, had lain there dead,
 And he had lived ; but now a God has turned 1060
 His wanton rage to fall on flocks and herds ;

¹ Comp. *Iliad*, vii. 303, xxii. 361. . . . Homer, however, makes Achilles drag the *corpse* of Hector at his chariot-wheels.

AIAS

And, therefore, there is no man strong enough,
 Be he who may, this body to entomb,
 But, cast forth here upon the yellow sands,
 It shall be prey for birds that haunt the shore.
 Therefore, I bid thee, keep from furious wrath ;
 For though we failed to rule him while he lived,
 We surely now will master him when dead,
 Wilt thou, or no, and with our hands control.
 For never when he lived would he obey 1070
 The words I spake : yet 'tis a vile man's part
 For one among the people not to deign
 To hear his masters. Never in a state
 Can laws be well administered when dread
 Has ceased to act, nor can an armed host
 Be rightly ruled, if no defence of fear
 And awe be present. But a man should think,
 Though sturdy in his frame, he yet may fall
 By some small chance of ill. And know this well,
 That he who has both fear and reverence 1080
 Has also safety. But where men are free
 To riot proudly, and do all their will,
 That State, be sure, with steady-blowing gale,
 Is driving to destruction, and will fall.
 For me, let seasonable awe be mine,
 Nor let us think that, doing what we please,
 We shall not one day pay the penalty
 In things that pain. These things come on in turn ;
 This fellow here was mocker hot and proud ;
 Now I am lifted up, and charge thee there
 This body not to bury, lest thou too,
 By burying him, should'st need a burial. 1090

Chor. O Menelaos, uttering maxims wise,
 Do not thyself then outrage so the dead.

Teu. I cannot wonder, friends, that one who lives,
 Brought up in low estate, should faults commit,
 When they who deem they come of noblest stock

AIAS

Such faulty words will utter in their speech.
 Come, let us start afresh : and dost thou say
 That thou did'st bring this man as stanch ally
 To these Achæans ? Did he not sail forth,
 Himself his only master ? Or what right
 Had'st thou to rule the people that he led
 Here from his home ? As Sparta's king thou cam'st,
 And not as ours. No greater right had'st thou
 To rule o'er him than he to reign o'er thee.
 Thou cam'st an under-captain, not the lord
 Of all the host, that thou should'st Aias lead.
 Rule those thou rulest, vent thy solemn words
 On them ; but I, though thou should'st say me nay,
 Or e'en that other leader, I will place
 This body in the tomb with all due rites,
 Not fearing thy big speeches. He warred not
 For that thy wife, as these who take their fill
 Of many labours, but to keep the oath
 By which he bound himself.¹ 'Twas not for thee,
 For never did he value men of nought.
 Come, therefore, bring more heralds with thee here ;
 Yea, bring the general's self. I would not care
 For all thy stir while thou art . . . what thou art.

Chor. I do not like such speech in midst of ills ;
 Sharp words will bite, however just they be.

Mene. This archer seems to have a lofty soul.²

Teu. E'en so ; I practise no ungentle craft.

Mene. Had'st thou a shield, thy boast would soar in-
 deed.

¹ In the post-Homeric legends, Tyndareus, the father of Helena, bound all her suitors by an oath that they would, in case of calamity, come to his daughter's help.

² In Homer, both Gods and heroes use the bow without any thought of its inferiority to other weapons. Later changes in warfare had, however, thrown it into the background ; and in Sparta it was used only by the Perioeci ; in Athens, by the foreigners (chiefly Scythians and Thracians) who were employed as a home-police.

AIAS

Teu. With thee, full-armed, I'll match myself light-armed.

Mene. How mightily thy tongue doth school thy thought.

Teu. With right on our side we may well be proud.

Mene. That he, slaying me, should prosper, was that right?

Teu. "Slaying thee!" 'Twere strange if thou wert dead, who liv'st.

Mene. God saves me still; in his intent I'm slain.

Teu. Saved by the Gods, put not the Gods to shame.

Mene. What? Find I fault with laws of those in heaven? 1130

Teu. Yes, if thou stopp'st my burying of the dead.

Mene. The burial of my foes: for 'tis not well.

Teu. And when was Aias ever found thy foe?

Mene. He hated me; I him; and this thou know'st.

Teu. Yes; for 'twas thou did'st cheat with juggling votes.

Mene. That fault was with the judges, not with me.

Teu. With goodly stealth, then, thou would'st work much ill.

Mene. This speech shall bring a bitter grief to some.

Teu. Not one whit more, 'twould seem, than we shall cause.

Mene. I say but this, thou shalt not bury him. 1140

Teu. And hear thou this, that buried he shall be.

Mene. I once did see a man full bold of speech,

Who urged his sailors in a storm to sail,

But not a word had he, when driven to prayer

By stress of tempest, but beneath a cloak

He crouched, and let each sailor tread on him;

And so for thee, and those thy haughty lips,

Some great storm, blowing from a tiny cloud,

Shall soon, perchance, hush all thy clamorous speech.

Teu. And I have seen a man of folly full 1150

AIAS

Who wantoned proudly in his neighbour's ills,
And then one came, in fashion like to me,
And like in mood, and looked, and spake this word :
" O man, abstain from outrage to the dead,
For if thou dost it, dearly shalt thou pay."
Such counsel did he give that wretched fool,
And now I see him ; and he is, 'twould seem,
None else but thee. Do I speak parables?

Mene. I go my way, for it is sore disgrace [1169]
With words to punish, force being in our power. [*Exit.*

Teu. Go, then, thy way ; to me 'tis worst disgrace
To hear a vain fool prating empty words.

Chor. Struggle of mighty strife there soon will be ;
But thou, O Teucros, speed,
Haste, some deep pit to find,
Where he shall find a grave of dreariest gloom,
Yet one which men will hold in memory.

[TECMESSA advances, with EURYSAKES
holding her hand.]

Teu. And lo ! they come at very nick of time,
And stand hard by, this hero's wife and child,
To deck the burial of the ill-starred dead. 1170
Come hither, boy, and standing suppliantly,
Lay hand upon the father that begat thee,
And sitting in the guise of one who prays,
Hold in thy hands my locks, and hers, and thine,
A treasure of entreaty. And should one
In all our army tear thee from the dead,
May he thus base, unburied, basely die,
An exile from his home, with all his race
As utterly cut off, as I now cut
This braided lock. Take it, O boy, and keep ; 1189
Let no man move thee, hold it suppliant ;
And ye stand by him, not as women found
Who should be men, but help him till I come
To bury him, though all should hinder me. [*Exit.*

AIAS

STROPHE I

Chor. When will it end, the last of wandering years,
That ever bring to me
The ceaseless woe of war's unresting toils, 1104
Through Troïa, drear and wide,
The Hellenes' shame and reproach ?

ANTISTROPHE I

Would that that man had entered Heaven's high
vault,
Or Hades, man's last home,
Who for the Hellenes stirred War's hateful strife ;
(O woes that woe beget !)
For he hath laid men low.

STROPHE II

He hath given me never to share
The joy of garlands of flowers,
Nor that of the deep, flowing cups,
Nor the dulcet notes of the flute,
Nor—curses light on his head !—
The pleasure that cometh with sleep.
Yea, from love, from love and its joys
He hath cut me off. (Ah, woe is me !)
And here I lie, cared for by none,
My locks all wet with the dews,
Keepsake of Troïa the sad. 1210

ANTISTROPHE II

Till now against terrors of night,
And sharp arrows a bulwark and stay,
Was Aias, the mighty and strong ;
Now he, too, a victim is gone
To the God that ruleth in gloom ;
What joy remaineth for me ?
Would I were there, where the rock,
Thick-wooded and washed by the waves,

AIAS

Hangs o'er the face of the deep,
Under Sunion's broad jutting peak,
That there we might hail, once again,
Athens, the holy, the blest.¹

1220

Enter TEUCROS.

Teu. Lo! I have hastened, seeing our general come,
Our Agamemnon, speeding on his way,
And plain it is he comes to speak hard words.

Enter AGAMEMNON.

Agam. They tell me that thou darest fearful words
To vent against us with impunity,
Thou, yes, e'en thou, of captive mistress born ;
A noble mother truly can'st thou boast,
That thou dost speak so loftily, and walk
On tip-toe proudly, who, being nought, dost strive
For him who is as nothing, and dost swear
We did not come to rule the host or fleet,
Or thee, or the Achæans ; but thou say'st
That Aias sailed himself his only lord.
And are not these big words to hear from slaves ?
And what was he for whom thou vauntest thus ?
Where went he, or where stood, where I was not ?
Had the Achæans then no men but him ?
A strife full bitter for Achilles' arms
We set before the Argives then, 'twould seem,
If everywhere a Teucros call us base,
And ye are not content, though worsted quite,
To yield to what the judges have decreed
With all but one consent, but still revile
Our name, and, when defeated, strike at us

1230

1240

¹ The words point to what every hearer of the play must have been familiar with. As a homeward ship rounded the point of Sunion, the Acropolis was seen in the distance, and all on board offered their prayers to the two national deities, Athena and Poseidon, whose shrines stood on the promontory.

AIAS

In secret guile. With such a mood as this
 There can be no establishment of law,
 If we shall cast off those whose right prevails,
 And lead the hindmost to the foremost rank.
 Nay, we must check these things. The safest men
 Are not the stout, broad-shouldered, brawny ones, 1250
 But still wise thinkers everywhere prevail ;
 And oxen, broad of back, by smallest scourge
 Are, spite of all, driven forward in the way ;
 And that sure spell, I see, will come ere long
 On thee, unless thou somehow wisdom gain,
 Who, when thy lord is gone, a powerless shade,
 Art bold, with wanton insolence of speech.
 Wilt thou not learn self-mastery ? Wilt thou not,
 Remembering what thou art by birth, when next
 Thou comest, bring some free-born man with thee 1260
 Who, in thy stead, shall speak thy words to us ?¹
 For I, indeed, learn nothing by thy speech,
 Thy barbarous accent so offends mine ear.

Chor. Would that ye both self-mastery could learn :
 Better than this I cannot wish you both.

Teu. Alas ! How soon the credit of the dead
 Flits, and is gone, and proves but treacherous stay,
 When this man, Aias, takes no count of thee,
 Not e'en in poor, cheap words, for whom thou oft
 Thy life exposing, strovest in the fight ; 1270
 But all the past is past, and thrown aside.
 O thou that speakest such a senseless speech,
 Hast thou no memory, none, of that same day
 When ye were shut within the bulwarks high,
 Already good as dead, and he, himself,
 Alone, came on to help, and freed you all,

¹ A slave, or foreigner, according to the laws of Athens and most Greek states, was not allowed to plead personally, but had to be represented by a citizen. Agamemnon taunts Teucros—as the son, not of Eribœa, the wife, but of Hesione, the concubine, of Telamon—with being an alien.

AIAS

Putting to flight your foes, when fire had seized
 *Your ships' tall masts, and where the sailors sit,
 And Hector's self was leaping o'er the trench
 Right on your sailors' boats?¹ Who staved this off?
 Was it not he of whom thou now dost say, 1290
 That never did he stir a foot for thee?
 Nay, wrought he not in your sight noble deeds?
 And yet once more, when he went forth to meet,
 In single combat, Hector, casting lots,
 At no man's word, the lot which he put in
 Was no deserter, lump of moistened clay,²
 But one full sure to be the first to leap
 With nimble spring from out the crested helm;
 'Twas he that did all this, and I with him,
 The base-born slave, of alien mother sprung.
 Thou wretch, what face hast thou to utter this? 1290
 And know'st thou not the father that begat
 Thy father, Pelops, was of alien blood,
 A Phrygian born of old;³ that Atreus, he
 Who gave thee life, was godless in his deeds,
 And placed before his brother banquet foul
 Of his own children's flesh; and thou thyself
 Wast born of Cretan mother, whom her sire,
 Detecting with the alien, headlong cast
 A prey to voiceless fishes? And dost thou,
 Such as thou art, reproach me with my birth,
 Such as I am, who on my father's side,

¹ Comp. *Iliad*, xv. 415.

² Sophocles, with a slight anachronism, brings before his Athenian audience what they were always willing to listen to, the story of the fraud by which the Dorian Cresphontes had obtained possession of Messenia.

³ In one form of the Pelops *mythos*, Thyestes, the brother of Atreus, was the adulterer, and Atreus drowned the adulteress. Here, however, Sophocles follows the legend which made Aerope, while yet in Crete, guilty of unchastity, and condemned by her father, Cratreus, to die by drowning. The executioner spared her life, and she afterwards married Atreus.

AIAS

From Telamon am sprung, who gained the prize
 Of all the host for valour, and obtained
 My mother as a concubine, who claimed
 A kingly birth from old Laomedon,
 And whom Alcmena's son as chosen gift
 Gave to my father ? And should I, thus sprung
 Noble, from noblest, shame my kith and kin,
 Whom now, in such ill plight as this enwrap,
 Thou thrustest out unburied, and dost feel
 No shame to speak it ? But of this be sure,
 If ye will cast him forth, ye will cast, too,
 Us three around him clinging ; for 'twere good,
 Striving for him to die in open fight,
 *Much rather than for that false wife of thine,¹
 Or for thy brother ; wherefore look thou well
 Not to my business only but thine own ;
 For should'st thou hurt me, thou shalt wish to be
 A coward rather than wax bold on me.

1300

1310

Enter ODYSSEUS.

Chor. Thou com'st, O King Odysseus, seasonably,
 If thou art here to stop, not stir the strife.

Odys. What is it, sirs ? for from afar I heard
 The Atreidæ's clamour o'er this noble corpse.

Agam. And have we not, O King Odysseus, heard
 But now most shameful language from this man ?

Odys. What was it ? I can much forgive a man
 Who, hearing vile things, answers evil words.

Agam. Foul words he heard, for such his deeds to me.

Odys. And what was this he did that injured thee ?

Agam. He says he will not leave this corpse un-
 tombed,

¹ So the text stands, yet the Trojan war was waged, not for the wife of Agamemnon, but for Helen, the wife of Menelaos. There may, perhaps, be a taunt implied in the phrase, implying either (1) that Agamemnon fought for Helen as if he were her husband, or (2) that he was urged to the war by his own wife, the sister of Helen.

AIAS

But, spite of my command, will bury it.

Odys. And may I, as a friend who speaks the truth,
Row in thy boat, as welcome as before?

Agam. Speak on ; or else I should be most unwise, 1330
Who count thee, of all Argives, truest friend.

Odys. Hear then ; by all the Gods, I thee entreat,
Cast not this man out so unfeelingly,
Nor leave him there unburied. Let not wrath
Prevail on thee that thou should'st hate so far
As upon right to trample. Unto me
This man of all the host was greatest foe,
Since I prevailed to gain Achilles' arms ;
But, though he were so, being what he was,
I would not put so foul a shame on him,
As not to own I looked upon a man,
The best and bravest of the Argive host, 1340
Of all that came to Troïa, saving one,
Achilles' self. Most wrong 'twould therefore be
That he should suffer outrage at thy hands ;
Thou would'st not trample upon him alone,
But on the laws of God. It is not right
To harm, though thou should'st chance to hate him sore,
A man of noble nature lying dead.

Agam. Art thou, Odysseus, this man's champion
found ?

Odys. E'en so ; I hated while 'twas right to hate.

Agam. Ought'st thou not then to trample on him
dead ?

Odys. In wrongful gain, Atreides, find not joy.

Agam. Full hard this fear of God for sovereign
prince. 1350

Odys. Not so to honour friends who counsel well.

Agam. The noblest man should those that rule obey.

Odys. Hush ! thou dost rule when worsted by ~~thy~~
friends.

Agam. Remember thou to whom thou giv'st this grace.

AIAS

Odys. An enemy, but still a noble one.

Agam. What wilt thou? Dost thou a foe's corpse
revere?

Odys. Far more than hatred *valeur* weighs with me.

Agam. Fickle and wayward, natures such as thine.

Odys. Many once friends again are bitter foes.

Agam. And dost thou praise the getting friends like
these? 1360

Odys. Unbending mood I am not wont to praise.

Agam. Thou wilt this very day make cowards of us.

Odys. Nay, righteous men in all the Hellenes' eyes.

Agam. And dost thou bid me let him bury it?

Odys. I do, for I myself shall come to that.

Agam. All men are like; each labours for himself.

Odys. Whom should I work for more than for myself?

Agam. It shall be called thy work then, and not mine.

Odys. Howe'er that be, in any case thou'rt kind.

Agam. But know this well, that I would grant to
thee 1370

Far greater boon than even this thou ask'st ;

But as for him, or here, or there, he still

Is hateful to me ; . . . But have thou thy will.

Chor. Who says, Odysseus, thou'rt not wise of heart,
Being what thou art, shall prove himself a fool.

Odys. And now I tell to Teucros that I stand

A friend as true as once I was a foe,

And I desire to join in burying him

Who there lies dead, to join in all the toil,

And fail in nought of all that men should pay

Of homage to the noblest men of earth. 1380

Teu. O good Odysseus, words of praise are mine

For all thou dost, and thou hast falsified

My thoughts of thee, for thou, most hostile found

To him of all the Argives, stood'st alone

To help him with thy hands, and did'st not dare

To trample living upon him the dead,

AIAS

When this brain-stricken captain of the host,
 He and his brother with him, came and sought
 To cast him out deprived of sepulture.
 Now, therefore, may the Father whose high sway
 Olympos rules, Erinnyes noting guilt,
 And Justice the avenger punish them
 For foul deeds foully, even as they wished
 To cast this man to shame unmerited.
 And thee, O son of aged Lartios,
 Loth am I now to let thee take thy share
 In burying him, lest I perchance should do
 What he, the dead, approves not. [All the rest
 Do thou do with me, and, if thou wilt bring
 Some soldiers from the host, we shall not grieve.]
 All else will I do, and for thee, know well,
 Thou show'st thyself to us as great of soul.

1390

Odys. I fain had joined, but if it please thee not
 That we should share, I go thy words accepting.

1400

Teu. Enough ; already the time

Is wearing swiftly away ;
 Haste ye, some to prepare
 A deep hollowed pit for the grave,
 And some a tall tripod set
 Fit for our task, girt with fire,
 Meet for washing the dead.

One band, let it fetch from the tent
 His breast-plate, his greaves, and his sword :
 And thou, O boy, in thy love,
 With all the strength that thou hast,
 Here, with thy hand on his side,
 Thy father's, lift him with me ;
 For still the hot veins pour their stream,
 The dark, thick blood of his strength.
 But come ye, come, one and all,
 Who boast of yourselves as his friends ;
 Hasten, come quick to the work,

1410

AIAS

Labouring for him who in all
Was good, and none better than he.

Gbor. Men may know many things on seeing them ;

But, ere they come in sight,

No man is prophet of the things that come,

1420

To tell how he shall fare.

PHILOCTETES

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

ODYSSEUS.

HERACLES.

NEOPTOLEMOS, *son of* ACHILLES.

Attendant.

PHILOCTETES.

Sailor.

ARGUMENT.—*Philoctetes, son of Pæas, king of the Malians, of Cæta, in Thessaly, wooed Helena, the daughter of Tyndareus; and her father having bound him and the other suitors by an oath, to defend her in case of wrong, he joined the great expedition of the Hellenes against Troïa. And as he landed at Chryse, treading rashly on the sacred ground of the nymph from whom the island took its name, he was bitten in the foot by a snake; and the wound became so noisome, and the cries of his agony so sharp, that the host could not endure his presence, and sent him in charge of Odysseus to Lemnos, and there he was left. And nine years passed away, and Achilles had died, and Hector, and Aias, and yet Troïa was not taken. But the Greeks took prisoner Helenos, a son of Priam, who had the gift of prophecy, and they learnt from him that it was decreed that it should never be taken but by the son of Achilles, and with the bow of Heracles. Now, this bow was in the hands of Philoctetes, for Heracles loved him, because he found him faithful; and when he died on Cæta, it was Philoctetes who climbed up the hill with him, and prepared the funeral pyre, and kindled it: therefore Heracles gave him his arrows and his bow. The Hellenes, then, first sent to Skyros to fetch Neoptolemos, the son of Achilles, and then, when he had arrived, they despatched him with Odysseus to bring Philoctetes from Lemnos.*

PHILOCTETES

SCENE.—*The shore of Lemnos. Rocks and a Cave in the background.*

Enter ODYSSEUS, NEOPTOLEMOS, and Attendant, followed by Chorus of Sailors, who remain in the background.

Odys. Here, then, we reach this shore of sea-girt isle,
Of Lemnos, by the foot of man untrod,
Without inhabitant, where, long ago,
(O thou who growest up to man's estate,
Sprung from a father noblest of the Greeks,
Son of Achilles, Neoptolemos,) I set on shore the Melian, Pœas' son,
His foot all ulcerous with an eating sore,
Sent on this errand by the chiefs that rule;
For never were we able tranquilly
To join in incense-offerings, nor to pour
Libations, but with clamour fierce and wild
He harassed all the encampment, shouting loud,
And groaning low. What need to speak of this? 10
It is no time for any length of speech,
Lest he should hear of my approach, and I
Upset the whole contrivance wherewithal
I think to take him. But thy task it is
To do thine office now, and search out well
Where lies a cavern here with double mouth,
Where in the winter twofold sunny side
Is found to sit in, while in summer heat
The breeze sends slumber through the tunnelled vault;
And just below, a little to the left, 20

PHILOCTETES

Thou may'st perchance a stream of water see,
If still it flow there. Go, and show in silence
If he is dwelling in this self-same spot,
Or wanders elsewhere, that in all that comes
Thou may'st give heed to me, and I may speak,
And common counsels work for good from both.

Neop. [*Clambering on the rocks.*] O King Odysseus, no
far task thou giv'st;

For such a cave, methinks, I see hard by.

Odys. Above thee or below? for this I see not.

Neop. *Here, just above; yet footstep there is none.

Odys. Look to it lest he chance to sleep within. 30

Neop. I see an empty cave untenanted.

Odys. *Are there no household luxuries within?

Neop. Some leaves pressed down as for some dweller's
use.

Odys. Is all else empty? nought beneath the roof?

Neop. A simple cup of wood, the common work
Of some poor craftsman, and this tinder stuff.

Odys. His precious store it is thou tell'st me of.

Neop. [*Starting back.*] Ah! . . . And here, too, these
rags are set to dry,

Full of some foul and sickening noisomeness.

Odys. Clearly the man is dwelling in this spot, 40
And is not distant. How could one so worn
With that old evil in his foot go far?

But either he is gone in search of food,
Or knows perchance some herb medicinal;
And therefore send this man to act the scout,
Lest he should come upon me unawares,
For he would rather seize on me than take
All other Argives. [Exit Attendant.]

Neop. He is gone to watch
The path. If aught thou needest, speak again.

Odys. Now should'st thou prove thyself, Achilles'
son, 50

PHILOCTETES

Stout-hearted for the task for which thou cam'st,
Not in thy body only, but if thou
Should'st hear strange things, by thee unknown till
now,

Still give thy help, as subaltern to me.

Neop. What dost thou bid me ?

Odys.

Thou must cheat and trick

The heart of Philoctetes with thy words ;
And when he asks thee who and what thou art,
Say thou'rt Achilles' son, (that hide thou not,)
And that thou sailest homeward, leaving there
The Achæans' armament ; with bitter hate
Hating them all, who having sent to beg
Thy coming with their prayers, as having this
Their only way to capture Ilion's towers,
Then did not deign to grant thee, seeking them
With special claims, our great Achilles' arms,
But gave them to Odysseus. What thou wilt
Say thou against me to the utmost ill :
In this thou wilt not grieve me ; but if thou
Wilt not do this, on all the Argive host
Thou wilt bring sorrow ; for, unless we get
His bow and arrows, it will not be thine
To sack the plain of Dardanos. And how
I cannot have, and thou may'st have access
To him both safe and trustworthy, learn thus ;
For thou hast sailed as bound by oath to none,¹
Not by constraint, nor with the earlier host,
But none of all these things can I deny ;
So, if he sees me while he holds his bow,
I perish, and shall cause thy death as well.
But this one piece of craft thou needs must work,

¹ For the suitors of Helen, who followed Agamemnon because of the oath with which her father Tyndareus had bound them, it would have been disgraceful to leave the army. Neoptolemos was under no such obligations, and this would give a probability to this story which, with any other of the host, would be wanting.

PHILOCTETES

That thou may'st steal those arms invincible.
 I know, O boy, thy nature is not apt
 To speak such things, nor evil guile devise ;
 But sweet it is to gain the conqueror's prize ;
 Therefore be bold. Hereafter, once again,
 We will appear in sight of all as just.
 But now for one short day give me thyself,
 And cast off shame, and then, in time to come,
 Be honoured, as of all men most devout.

Neop. The things, O son of Lartios, which I grieve
 To hear in words, those same I hate to do.
 I was not born to act with evil arts,
 Nor I myself, nor, as they say, my sire.
 Prepared am I to take the man by force,
 And not by fraud : for he with one weak foot
 Will fail in strength to master force like ours ;
 And yet, being sent thy colleague, I am loth
 To get the name of traitor ; but I wish,
 O king, to miss my mark in acting well,
 Rather than conquer, acting evilly.

Odys. O son of noble sire, I, too, when young,
 Had a slow tongue and ready-working hand ;
 But now, by long experience, I have found
 Not deeds, but words prevail at last with men.

Neop. But what is all thou bidd'st me say but lies ? 104

Odys. I bid thee Philoctetes take with guile.

Neop. And why by guile, when suasion might succeed ?

Odys. He will not hearken, and by force thou can'st not.

Neop. Has he so dread a strength whereto he trusts ?

Odys. His darts unerring, bringing swiftest death.

Neop. Is it not safe, then, e'en to speak with him ?

Odys. Not so, unless, as I repeat, in guile.

Neop. Dost thou not count it base to utter lies ?

Odys. Not so, when falsehood brings deliverance.

Neop. But with what face can one such falsehoods
 speak ? 110

PHILOCTETES

Odys. When acts bring gain, it is not well to shrink.

Neop. What gain for me that he should come to Troïa ?

Odys. This bow and this alone shall Troïa take.

Neop. Am I not destined, as thou said'st, to take it ?

Odys. Nor thou from these, nor these from thee apart.

Neop. If so it stands, then we must hunt for them.

Odys. So doing thou shalt gain two gifts of price.

Neop. What are they ? Learning them I shall not shrink.

Odys. Thou shalt be known at once as wise and good.

Neop. Come, then, I'll do it, casting off all shame. ¹²⁰

Odys. Rememb'rest thou the counsel that I gave ?

Neop. Be sure of that, when I have once agreed.

Odys. Do thou, then, here abiding, wait for him,

And I will go, lest I be seen with thee,

And send our scout to yon ship back again.

And if ye seem to me to linger long,

The self-same man will I send back, in guise

Of seaman's dress, his form disguising so

That he may come unknown ; and thou, my son,

When he speaks craftily, do thou receive

The things shat profit in each word he drops :

Now to the ship I go, and trust to thee ;

And Hermes, God of Guile, who sends us on,

And Victory, e'en Athena Polias,¹

Who saves me ever, lead us on to win.

[*Exit*

130

Chorus advances.

STROPHE I

Chor. What, what is meet, my prince,

For me, a stranger in a land that's strange,

To utter or conceal,

With one so prone to look suspiciously ?

¹ The form of the invocation connected itself with the sanctuaries of Athens. Besides the temple built to her as Athena Polias, there was a statue of her in the Acropolis in the character of Victory.

PHILOCTETES

Tell me, I pray ; his art
 All other art and counsel still excels,
 Whose hands the sceptre wield
 That Zeus assigns from heaven to them that rule ; ¹⁴⁷
 And thou, my son, hast gained
 This glory of the old ancestral past ;
 Tell me, then, tell, I pray,
 What service 'tis our work to do for thee.
Neop. Now, it may be, thou dost wish
 To see the place where he lies
 Far off. Take courage, and look ;
 But when he appears who went forth,
 Wayfarer dread from his home,
 Then come thou at my beck,
 And strive to render thy help
 As each present need may demand.

ANTISTROPHE I

Chor. Thou tellest, O my king, 150
 Of what has been full long a care to us,
 To watch that eye of thine
 For thine especial need ; but tell, I pray,
 What kind of home is his,
 And in what spot he now may chance to be.
 'Tis not unmeet to know,
 Lest he should fall upon me unawares
 What place, what seat has he,
 What path, or near, or far, does he now tread ?
Neop. Thou see'st this dwelling with its double
 door, 161
 Its chamber in the rock.
Chor. And where is that poor sufferer absent now ?
Neop. To me it is plain that he treads
 This path near, hunting for food.
 For this is the fashion of life,
 So rumour runs, that he leads,

PHILOCTETES

With swift darts shooting the game,
Wretched, and wretchedly fed,
And that here none wendeth his way,
As friend and healer of ills.

STROPHE II

Chor. I pity him, for one,
Thinking how he, with none to care for him, 170
Seeing no face of friend,
Ever, poor wretch, in dreary loneliness,
Suffers from sore disease,
And wanders on in sore perplexity
At every urgent need.
Oh, how, yea, how can he his sorrows bear?
*O handiwork of Gods!
O wretched men, who miss their life's true mean!

ANTISTROPHE II

He, born of ancient house,
And falling short of none of all the line, 180
Now stript of all the things
That make up life, lies here, apart from all,
With dappled deer, or beasts
With shaggy manes, still dwelling in his pain,
In hunger fierce, with grief
That none can heal; and Echo far and wide,
With ever-babbling cry,
Repeats his wail of bitter, loud lament. 190

Neop. I wonder at none of these things;
If I err not, they come from a God,
From Chryse, ruthless of soul,¹
And now the woes that he bears,
With none to care for him near,
From some God needs must they come,

¹ In one form of the legend, Chryse was enamoured of Philoctetes, and, failing to gain his love, cursed him, and caused the serpent to avenge her.

PHILOCTETES

That he may not Troïa destroy
With darts of Gods none can resist,
Ere the time run on to its close,
When, as they say, it is doomed
To be by those weapons subdued.

200

Chor. Hush, hush, O boy!

Neop. What is this?

Chor. The sounds of step we heard,
As of some man who drags his weary way,
Or here or there around;
There falls, ah yes, there falls upon my ears
Clear sound of one who creeps,
Slow and reluctant, on the well-worn track.
It is not hid from me

That bitter cry that cometh from afar,
Wearing man's strength away;

For very clearly comes his wailing cry,
But now, O boy, 'tis time

210

Neop. For what?

Chor. For thoughts and counsels new,
For lo! the man is not far off, but near;

No note of reed-pipe his,
As shepherd roaming idly through the fields,

But stumbling, for sheer pain,

He utters a lament that travels far,

Or seeing this our ship

Lying anchored in the bay inhospitable;

For sharp and dread his cry.

Enter PHILOCTETES in worn and tattered raiment.

Phil. Ho, there, my friends!

Who are ye that have come to this our shore,
And by what chance? for neither is it safe
To anchor in, nor yet inhabited.

220

What may I guess your country and your race?
Your outward guise and dress of Hellas speak,

PHILOCTETES

To me most dear, and yet I fain would hear
Your speech ; and draw not back from me in dread,
As fearing this my wild and savage look,
But pity one unhappy, left alone,
Thus helpless, friendless, worn with many ills.
Speak, if it be ye come to me as friends :

Nay, answer me, it is not meet that I
Should fail of this from you, nor ye from me. 230

Neop. Know this then first, O stranger, that we come,
Of Hellas all ; for this thou seek'st to know.

Phil. O dear-loved sound ! Ah me ! what joy it is
After long years to hear a voice like thine !
What led thee hither, what need brought thee here ?
Whither thy voyage, what blest wind bore thee on ?
Tell all, that I may know thee who thou art.

Neop. By birth I came from sea-girt Skyros' isle,
And I sail homeward, I, Achilles' son, 240
Named Neoptolemos. Now know'st thou all.

Phil. O son of dearest father, much-loved land,
Thou darling boy of Lycomedes old,
Whence sailing, whither bound, hast thou steered hither?

Neop. At present I from Ilion make my voyage.

Phil. What say'st thou ? Thou was surely not with

us

A sailor when the fleet to Ilion came ?

Neop. What ? Dids't thou, too, share that great enter-
prise ?

Phil. And know'st thou not, O boy, whom thou dost
see ?

Neop. How can I know a man I ne'er beheld ? 250

Phil. And did'st thou never hear my name, nor fame
Of these my ills, in which I pined away ?

Neop. Know that I nothing know of what thou ask'st.

Phil. O crushed with many woes, and of the Gods
Hated am I, of whom, in this my woe,
No rumour travelled homeward, nor went forth

PHILOCTETES

Through any clime of Hellas! But the men
Who cast me out in scorn of holiest laws
Laugh in their sleeve, and this my sore disease
Still grows apace, and passes into worse. 281
My son, O boy that call'st Achilles sire,
Lo! I am he, of whom perchance thou heard'st,
That I possess the arms of Heracles,
The son of Pœas, Philoctetes, whom
Our generals twain and Kephallene's king¹
Basely cast forth thus desolate, worn out
Through fierce disease, with bite of murderous snake,
Fierce bite, sore smitten; and with that, O boy,
Thus desolate they left me, when they touched 276
From sea-girt Chryse in their armament;
And when they saw me, tired and tempest-worn,
Asleep in vaulted cave upon the shore,
Gladly they went, and left me, giving me
Some wretched rags that might a beggar suit,
And some small store of food they chanced to have.
And thou, my son, what kind of waking-up
Think'st thou I had, when I arose from sleep,
And found them gone—what bitter tears I wept.
What groans of woe I uttered? when I saw
The ships all gone, with which till then I sailed,
And no man on the spot to give me aid, 284
Nor help me struggling with my sore disease;
And, looking all around, I nothing found
But pain and torment, and of this, my son,
Full plenteous store. And so the years went on,
Month after month, and in this lowly cell
I needs must wait upon myself. My bow
Found what my hunger needed, striking down
The swift-winged doves, but whatsoe'er the dart,

¹ Kephallene is named, rather than Ithaca, as implying a greater scorn, the Kephallenians being of ill repute both as traders and as pirates.

PHILOCTETES

Sent from the string, might hit, to that poor I
Must wend my way, and drag my wretched foot,
Even to that; and if I wanted drink,
Or, when the frost was out in winter time,
Had need to cleave my firewood, this poor I
Crept out, and fetched. And then no fire had I,
But rubbing stone with stone I brought to light,
Not without toil, the spark deep hid within;
And this e'en now preserves me; for a cell
To dwell in, if one has but fire, provides
All that I need, except release from pain.

And now, my son, learn thou this island's tale:
No sailor here approaches willingly,
For neither is there harbour, nor a town,
Where sailing he may profit gain, or lodge.
No men of prudence make their voyage here;
Yet some, perchance, may come against their will;
(Such things will happen in the lapse of years;)
And these, my son, when they do come, in words
Show pity on me, and perchance they give
Some food in their compassion, and some clothes;
But none is willing, when I mention that,
To take me safely home, but here poor I
Wear out my life, for nine long years and more,
In hunger and distress this eating sore
Still nursing. Such the deeds th' Atreidæ did,
And great Odysseus. May the Olympian Gods
Give them to bear like recompense for this!

Chor. I seem, O Pœas' son, to pity thee
As much as any stranger that has come.

Neop. And I myself am witness to thy words,
And know that they are true, for I have found
The Atreidæ and the great Odysseus base.

Phil. What! Hast thou too a grudge against those
vile ones,
The Atreidæ, that thy wrongs have stirred thy rage?

PHILOCTETES

Neop. Would it were mine some day to glut my rage !
That Sparta and Mykenæ both might know,
That Skyros, too, is mother of brave men.

Phil. Well said, O boy ! And what offence has
caused

This mighty wrath with which thou comest here ?

Neop. I'll tell thee, Pœas' son, though scarce I can, ³³⁰
What I endured of outrage at their hands ;
For when the Fates decreed Achilles' death,

Phil. Ah me ! Speak nothing further till I learn
This first ; and is the son of Peleus dead ?

Neop. Dead is he, not by any man shot down,
But by a God,—by Phœbos, as they say.¹

Phil. Well, noble He that slew, and he that fell ;
And I, my son, am much in doubt, if first
To ask thy sufferings, or to mourn for him.

Neop. Thine own misfortunes are enough, I trow ;
Thou need'st not sorrow o'er thy neighbour's lot. ³⁴⁰

Phil. Thou sayest well, and therefore tell again
That business in the which they outraged thee.

Neop. There came for me in ship all gaily decked,
High-born Odysseus, and my father's friend,²
Who reared his youth, and said, or true or false,
That since my father's death none else but me
Might take the Towers. And so with words like these,
O stranger, no long time they kept me there
From sailing quickly ; chiefly in my love,
My longing love for him who lay there dead, ³⁵⁰
That I might see him yet unsepulchred,
For never had I known him. Next to this,
Promise full fair there was that I should go,
And take the Towers that over Troïa hang.

¹ "As they say ;" for the arrow, though guided by Apollo, was shot by Paris.

² Phoenix, who, as the legend ran, went with Odysseus to Skyros to fetch the son of Achilles.

PHILOCTETES

And as I sailed our second morning's voyage,
 With prospering oar Sigeion's shore I reached,
 Full bitter to me; and forthwith the host,
 All standing round, with one voice greeted me,
 E'en as I landed, swearing that they saw
 Achilles who was gone, alive again;
 He then lay there, and I, poor hapless boy,
 Wept over him, and not long after went 260
 To those Atreidæ as my friends, (for so
 'Twas meet to think them,) and of them I asked
 My father's arms, and all things else of his.
 And they spake out, ah me! a shameless speech:
 "O offspring of Achilles, all the rest
 That was thy father's it is thine to choose;
 But of those arms another now is lord,
 Laertes' son." And I with many a tear
 Rise up in hot displeasure, and I say,
 In my fierce wrath, "O wretch! and have ye dared
 To give my arms, before ye learnt my mind, 371
 To any but to me?" And then there spake
 Odysseus, for he chanced to stand hard by,
 "Yea, boy; most justly have they given them me,
 For I, being with him, saved both him and them."
 And I, being angry, hurled all evil words
 Straight in his teeth, and nothing left unsaid,
 Should he deprive me of those arms of mine.
 And he at this point, though not prone to wrath,
 Stung to the quick, thus answered what he heard:
 "Thou wast not where we were, but stood'st aloof
 Where thou should'st not; and since thou speak'st to
 us,
 So bold of tongue, with these thou ne'er shalt sail 380
 To Skyros back." And hearing words like these,
 And foul reproaches, now I homeward sail,
 Out of mine own rights cheated by a man
 Base-born, Odysseus, basest of the base.

PHILOCTETES

And yet I blame not him so much as those
 Who reign supreme; for all a city hangs,
 And all an army, on the men that rule;
 And they who wax unruly in their deeds
 Come to be base through mood of those that guide.
 Now my whole tale is told, and he who hates
 The Atreidæ, may he be my friend and God's!

390

Chor. O Goddess Earth, that reignest on the hills,¹

Giver of food to all;

Mother of Zeus himself,

Who dwellest where the full Pactolos rolls²

Its streams o'er golden sands;

There also, dreaded Mother, I invoked thee,

When all the scorn of the Atreidæ fell

On him who standeth here,

When they his father's weapons gave away

(O Holy One, who sittest on thy car,

400

On lions fierce that slay the mighty bulls!)

To Lartios' son a glory and a prize.

Phil. 'Twould seem that you have hither sailed, my
 friends,

With sorrow's friendship-token, and with mine

Your voice accords, so that I see these deeds

Are by the Atreidæ and Odysseus done:

For well I know that he with that glib tongue

Leaves no base speech or subtlety untouched,

From which nought right shall in the issue spring.

At this I marvel not, but much to think

410

The elder Aias should have seen and borne it

Neop. He was not living, friend. Had he but lived,
 I had not then been plundered of these things.

¹ The Goddess, Earth (*Ge*) is here, as in the later form of Greek mythology, identified (1) with Cretan Rhea, the mother of Zeus, and (2) with the Phrygian Kybele, riding on her lions, the Goddess of the land where the Atreidæ had done their wrong.

² The Pactolos flowed from Mount Tmolos, the head-quarters of the worship of Kybele.

PHILOCTETES

Phil. What say'st thou? Is he also dead and gone?

Neop. Think thou of him as seeing light no more.

Phil. Ah, wretched me! That son to Tydeus born,
That child of Sisypchos that Lartios bought,¹
They will not die;—for they ought not to live.

Neop. Not dead are they, be sure: but, lo! they live,
And now are mighty in the Argives' host. 420

Phil. And what of that old worthy, my good friend,
Nestor of Pylos; for he still was wont
With his wise counsels to restrain their ill.

Neop. He, too, fares badly, since Antilochos,
His dear-loved son, has left him and is dead.

Phil. Ah, me! These two that thou hast told me of,
Were those whose deaths I least had wished to hear.
Fie on it! fie! and whither can one look,
When these men die and here Odysseus lives,
Who ought in their stead to be named a corpse? 430

Neop. A crafty foe is he, yet craftiest schemes,
O Philoctetes, oft a hindrance find.

Phil. Now tell me, by the Gods, and where is he,
Patroclos, whom thy father loved so well?

Neop. He too is dead, and I, in one short speech,
Will tell thee this, that war ne'er wills to take
One scoundrel soul, but evermore the good.

Phil. I bear thee witness, and for that same reason
I'll ask thee now of one of little worth,
But open-mouthed and crafty, how he fares. 440

Neop. And who is this thou speak'st of but Odysseus?

Phil. I mean not him, but one, Thersites named,
Who never was content to speak but once,
When no man asked him,—know'st thou if he lives?

Neop. I saw him not, but heard that still he lived.

Phil. Well may he live, for nothing bad will die,

¹ See note on Aias, 188.

PHILOCTETES

So well the Gods do fence it round about;
And still they joy to turn from Hades back
The cunning and the crafty, while they send
The just and good below. What thoughts can I 450
Of such things form, how offer praise, when still,
Praising the Gods, I find the Gods are base?

Neop. I, O thou son of sire whom Ceta knows,
I, for the future, with a far-off glance
At Ilion and the Atreidæ, stand on guard;
And where the worse o'erpowers the better man,
And good things perish, and the coward wins,
These men, and such as these, I ne'er will love;
But rocky Skyros shall in times to come¹
Suffice for me to take mine ease at home. 460
Now to my ship I go. And thou, O son
Of Pœas, fare thee well, good luck be thine,
And may the Gods release thee from thy pain,
As thou desirest! Now then let us start;
When God fair weather gives us, then we sail.

Phil. And do ye start already?

Neop. Yes; the time
Bids us our voyage think near, and not far off.

Phil. By thy dear sire and mother, I, my son,
Implore thee as a suppliant, by all else 470
To these most dear, thus lonely leave me not,
Abandoned to these evils which thou see'st,
With which thou hearest that I still abide;
But think of me as thrown on you by chance:
Right well I know how noisome such a freight;
Yet still do thou endure it. Noble souls
Still find the base is hateful, and the good
Is full of glory. And for thee, my son,
Leaving me here comes shame that is not good;

¹ The proverbial poverty and insignificance of the island gave the resolve of Neoptolemos a special emphasis. "Even Skyros, poor as it is."

PHILOCTETES

But doing what I ask thee thou shalt have
 Thy meed of greatest honour, should I reach
 Alive and well the shores of Ceta's land.
 Come, come! The trouble lasts not one whole day : 480
 Take heart ; receive me ; put me where thou wilt,
 In hold, or stern, or stem, where least of all
 I should molest my fellow-passengers.
 Ah, by great Zeus, the suppliant's God, consent ;
 I pray thee, hearken. On my knees I beg,
 Lame though I be and powerless in my limbs.
 Nay, leave me not thus desolate, away
 From every human footstep. Bring me safe,
 Or to my home, or where Chalkodon holds¹
 His seat in fair Eubœa : thence the sail
 To Ceta and the ridge of Trachis steep, 490
 And fair Spercheios is not far from me,
 That thou may'st shew me to my father dear,
 Of whom long since I've feared that he perchance
 Has passed away. For many messages
 I sent to him by those who hither came,
 Yea, suppliant prayers that he would hither send,
 Himself to fetch me home. But either he
 Is dead, or else, as happens oft with men
 Who errands take, they holding me, 'twould seem,
 In slight account, pushed on their homeward voyage.
 But now, for here I come to thee as one
 At once my escort and my messenger, 500
 Be thou my helper, my deliverer thou,
 Seeing all things full of fear and perilous chance,
 Or to fare well, or fall in evil case ;
 And one that's free from sorrow should look out
 For coming dangers, and, when most at ease,

¹ Chalkodon, son of Abas, had been the ally of Heracles : so Philoctetes might therefore naturally look for a welcome from him. In Athenian legends, Elephenor, the son of Chalkodon, was the friend of Theseus.

PHILOCTETES

Should then keep wariest watch upon his life,
Lest unawares he perish utterly.

Chor. Have pity, O my prince, for he hath told
Of sorrows which, I pray
No friend of mine may know.

But if, O prince, the Atreidæ, rough and fierce, 610
Thou hatest in thy soul,

I, reckoning on the profit-side for him
The evil they have done, would take him home,
And on my good ship swift

Make for the haven which his heart desires,
Escaping thus the righteous wrath of Gods.

Neop. Take heed lest thou be very pliant now,
But when thou hast thy fill of that foul pest, 620
Should'st show no more at one with these thy words.

Chor. Far bethat from me ! Thou shalt ne'er have cause
With that reproach to vilify my name.

Neop. Right shameful were it I more loth should seem
Than thou to help a stranger in his need :

But, if it please you, let us sail at once.

And let him too be quick to start with us ;

Our ship will take him, will not say him nay.

This only pray I, that the Gods may bring us
From this land safe to where we seek to sail.

Phil. O day best loved by me, and man most dear, 630
And ye, my sailor friends, how best may I
Show in my acts the grateful love I feel ?

Come, let us go, my son, and bid farewell
To that my homeless home, that thou may'st learn
What way I lived, and how I was by nature
Full stout of heart. Another man, I trow,
Would hardly even bear with glance of eye,
To look on such a sight. But I have learnt,
Through sheer constraint, to acquiesce in ills.

Chor. [*To* NEOFTOLEPOS.] Stop ; let us learn. Two
men draw near, the one

PHILOCTETES

A sailor from thy ship, the other seems
A stranger. Ask of them, and then go in.

540

Enter Attendant, disguised as a trader, and a Sailor.

Attend. Son of Achilles, this my shipmate here,
Who with two others o'er the ship kept watch,
I bade to tell where thou might'st chance to be ;
For so I met him, not intending it,
But to the self-same harbour brought by chance.
For I, as owner of my little boat,
Was sailing home from Ilion to the shores
Of Peparêthos, where the grapes grow fair ;¹
And when I heard that all those sailors there
Had sailed with thee, I deemed it well to wait
Silent no longer, but to tell thee all,
And then to sail with what my news deserves :
For thou know'st naught of what concerns thee much,
The new plans which the Argives form for thee ;
Nor are they plans alone, but of a truth
Are being done, no longer tarrying.

550

Neop. I owe thee thanks for this thy forethought, friend,
And if I be not base those thanks will last.
But tell me what thou mean'st, that I may know
What new device thou from the Argives bring'st.

560

Attend. They with good show of ships pursue thee now,
The aged Phœnix and great Theseus' sons.

Neop. By force to bring me back, or by their words ?

Attend. I know not ; what I heard, I come to tell.

Neop. And can it be that Phœnix and his mates
Make such good speed for those Atreidæ's sake ?

Attend. Know that this is being done and lingers not.

Neop. How was it then Odysseus did not come,

¹ Peparêthos, almost as famous as Chios for its wine, would naturally be one of the chief sources of supply for the Hellenes who were besieging Troia. In the time of Demosthenes, its produce was exported as far as Pontus.

PHILOCTETES

A volunteer, self-summoned? Did he fear?

Attend. He and the son of Tydeus went their way 570
To seek another, when I started forth.

Neop. And who was this for whom Odysseus sailed?

Attend. There was a man, . . . but tell me first who this
I see may be, and what thou say'st, speak low.

Neop. This, friend, is Philoctetes, known to fame.

Attend. Ask me no more, but with thine utmost speed
Hasten thy way, and from this island sail.

Phil. What saith he, boy, and why with darkling words
Does he, that sailor, traffic in my life?

Neop. I know not what he says, but all he speaks 581
He must speak out to thee, and me, and these.

Attend. O son of great Achilles, charge me not
Before the host with saying things I ought not;
For I, doing them good service, (far at least
As poor man can), get good return for it.

Neop. I am the Atreidæ's foe, and this man here
Is my best friend, because he hates them too;
And thou, who comest as a friend to me,
Should'st not hide from us aught of what thou heard'st.

Attend. Take heed, O boy.

Neop. Long since I'm on the watch.

Attend. I'll hold thee guilty.

Neop. Hold, but tell thy tale. 591

Attend. That will I tell. It is to bring this man
Those twain, whose names thou knowest, Tydeus' son
And great Odysseus, sail, by oath fast bound
That they will either bring him back, with words
Persuading him, or else with force and arms;
And all the Achæans heard Odysseus speak
This clearly out. More confident was he
That he should do it than the other was.

Neop. And for what cause, so long a time elapsed,
Did those Atreidæ turn to seek this man
Whom for so long they had in exile left?

600

PHILOCTETES

Whence came this yearning? Can it be the power
And vengeance of the Gods who wrong requite?

Attend. All this, for thou perchance hast heard it not,
I now will tell. A certain noble seer,
A son of Priam, Helenos his name,
There was, whom this man, going forth alone
By night (I mean Odysseus, full of craft,
On whom all words of shame and baseness fall)
As prisoner took, and where the Achæans meet
As goodly spoil displayed him. And he then,
Both all the rest to them did prophesy, 610
And that they should not take the Towers that hang
O'er Troïa, till, with words persuading him,
They fetched the man who in this island dwells.
And when Laertes' offspring heard the seer
Say this, he straightway promised he would bring
This man, and to the Achæans show him there,
And that he thought to do it with his will,
But, will or nill, to bring him; and he gave
Full leave to any man to take his head
If he should fail. And now, boy, thou hast heard
All that I know, and I must counsel speed 620
For thee and him, and any man thou lov'st.

Phil. Ah, woe is me! Did he, that utter mischief,
Swear to persuade me, and to bring me back
To those Achæans? Just as soon would I
Be moved, when dead, from Hades to return
To light of day, as that man's father did.¹

Attend. Of this I know not. To my ship I go,
And now God send you all his choicest gifts. [Exit

Phil. And is it not, boy, dreadful that this man,
The son of Lartios, should expect to bring me

¹ Sisypheos, who is spoken of as the real father of Odysseus, had, it was said, begged Persephone to allow him to return to the world of the living that he might punish his wife, Merope, for leaving him unburied, and then refused to go back again to Hades.

PHILOCTETES

With glozing words, and show me from his ship
 To all the crowd of Argives? Nay, not so: 530
 For rather would I listen to the voice
 Of that dread viper which my soul most hates,
 That made me thus disabled. But his soul
 Will say all, dare all, and I know full well
 That he will come. But now, boy, let us go,
 That a wide sea may part us from the ship
 Odysseus sails in. Oft hath timely haste,
 When toil hath ceased, brought slumber and repose.

Neop. Were it not well, when this head-wind shall cease,
 Then to sail on, for now 'tis in our teeth? 640

Phil. 'Tis all fair sailing when thou flee'st from ill.

Neop. *I know it, but the wind retards them too.

Phil. There is no wind retards the pirate's work,
 When time is come for theft and plundering.

Neop. Well, if it please thee, let us go, but first
 Take what thou needest and desirest most.

Phil. Some things there are I need, though small the
 choice.

Neop. What is there which thou find'st not on my ship?

Phil. A herb there is with which I mostly lull
 My wound's sharp pain, and make it bearable. 650

Neop. Well, bring it out. What else desirest thou?

Phil. If from my quiver aught has chanced to drop
 Through my neglect, that no man find it here.

Neop. Is this that thou dost bear the far-famed bow?

Phil. This, and none other hold I in my hands.

Neop. And may I have a nearer view of it,
 And hold it, and salute it, as a God?

Phil. Thou shalt have this, my son, and if aught else
 Of mine shall please thee, that too shall be thine.

Neop. I wish and long, and yet my wish stands thus;
 I fain would, were it right; if not, refuse. [660

Phil. Thou askest but thy due, and it is right,
 My son, who only giv'st me to behold

PHILOCTETES

The light of day, and yon Cætæan shore,
 My aged father, and my friends,—whose arm,
 When I was trodden down, has raised me up
 Above my foes. Take heart : it shall be thine
 To touch them, yea, and give them back to me,
 And boast that thou, alone of all that live,
 Hast, for thy virtue's sake, laid hands on them :
 For I too gained them by good deeds I did. 616

Neop. I grieve not now to see thee as a friend,
 And take thee with me, for a man that knows,
 Receiving good, to render good again,
 Would be a friend worth more than land or goods ;
 Go thou within.

Phil. And I will take thee too :
 My ailment makes me crave to have thy help.
[*Exeunt into the cavern*]

STROPHE I

Chor. I know the tale, though these eyes saw it not,
 Of him who came too near
 The marriage-bed of Zeus,
 *How him, a prisoner bound on whirling wheel,
 The son of Kronos smote, omnipotent ;¹ 680
 But never have I seen or heard of one
 Of mortal men that met
 A gloomier fate than his,
 Who having done no wrong to life or goods,
 But just among the just,
 Was brought thus low, in doom dishonourable
 And wonder holds my soul,
 How he, still hearing in his loneliness
 The dashing of the breakers on the shore,

¹ Ixion's guilt, in the old Greek legends, was, first, that of treacherous murder, and then, when Zeus had compassion upon the madness and misery that followed, the crime here referred to, for which Zeus bound him for ever to a fiery, never-resting wheel in Tartaros.

PHILOCTETES

Endured still to live
A life all lamentable;

690

ANTISTROPHE I

Where he alone was neighbour to himself,
Powerless to move a limb,
And having on this isle
No habitant, companion in his grief,
With whom to wail his sharp and bleeding pain,
In echoing burst of lamentation loud,
With none to stanch or soothe
(When such ill came on him)
The scalding blood that oozed from cankering sore
Of that envenomed foot,
With healing herbs, or fetch them from the earth
That giveth food to all;
But ever like a child without its nurse,
Now here, now there, he dragged his writhing limbs,
Wending his way for ease,
When the pain respite gave:

700

STROPHE II

Never from out the lap of sacred earth
The seed-corn gathering,
Nor aught that we, who live by work, enjoy,
But only what perchance
He gained, the pangs of hunger to appease,
With those swift-winged darts
That travelled straight and far.
O soul deep plunged in woe,
Who never, in the space of ten long years,
Did know the wine-cup's joy,
But still did go, where eager glance might guide,
To drink of standing pool;

710

ANTISTROPHE II

But now, thou, meeting one from heroes sprung,

PHILOCTETES

120

Shalt end in being great,
And prosper well after those woes of thine ;
Who now, the long months passed,
Art borne in ship that travels o'er the waves
To that thy father's home,
Where wander Malia's nymphs,
And by Spercheios' banks,
Where he who bore the brazen shield, though man,¹
Draws near, a God, to Gods,
Bright with the fire that flashes from the sky,
High above Cæta's slopes.

Enter PHILOCTETES and NEOPTOLEMOS from the cavern.

Neop. Come, if thou wilt. But why, without a cause,
Stand'st thou so silent and astonishèd ? [730

Phil. [*Groaning heavily.*] Ah ! ah ! ah !

Neop. What means this cry ?

Phil. 'Tis nought, my son ; go on.

Neop. Art thou in pain from onset of disease ?

Phil. Not so, not so ; I think 'tis easier now.

Ye Gods ! ye Gods !

Neop. Why groan'st thou thus, and callest on the
Gods ?

Phil. That they may come with power to soothe and
save.

Ah ! ah ! ah ! [*Groaning in agony.*]

Neop. What ails thee ? Wilt thou thus thy silence
keep, 740

And wilt not tell ? 'Tis clear some ill is on thee.

Phil. I perish, O my son, and cannot hide
The evil from thee ? Oh, it darts, it darts.
O misery ! O miserable me !

¹ The man who bore the brazen shield is, of course, Heracles, the friend of Philoctetes, from whom, though as yet neither he nor the Chorus dream of it, his deliverance is at last to come.

PHILOCTETES

I perish, O my son ; it eats me up.

[*Gasps with suppressed agony.*]

Oh ! by the Gods, my son, if thou hast there
A sword at hand, smite thou this foot of mine,
And lop it off at once. Care not for life:
Come, boy, be quick. . . .

Neop. And what new sudden grief 750
Is this for which thou mak'st this wailing and lament ?

Phil. Thou know'st, my son.

Neop.

What is't ?

Phil.

Thou knowest, boy.

Neop. What is it ? I know not.

Phil.

How can it be

Thou dost not know it well ? Ah me ! Ah me !

[*Gasping, as before.*]

Neop. Sore is the growing weight of thy disease.

Phil. Yea, sore beyond all words : nay, pity me.

Neop. What shall I do then ?

Phil.

Do not in thy fear

Desert me, for it now is come, perchance,

*After long time, retreating when 'tis sated.

Neop. Ah ! miserable one, most miserable, 760
All worn with many woes, dost thou then wish
That I should hold thee, touch thee ?

Phil.

Nay, not so :

But take my bow and arrows, which but now
Thou asked'st for, and keep them till the force
Of the sharp pain be spent ; yea, guard them well,
For slumber takes me, when this evil ends ;
Nor can it cease before : but thou must leave me
To sleep in peace : and should they come meanwhile,
Of whom we heard, by all the Gods I charge thee,
Nor with thy will, nor yet against it, give 770
These things to them, by any art entrapped,
Lest thou should'st deal destruction on thyself,
And me who am thy suppliant.

PHILOCTETES

Neop. Take good heart,
If forethought can avail. To none but thee
And me shall they be given. Hand them me,
And good luck come with them!

Phil. [*Giving his bow and arrows to* NEOPTOLEMOS.]
Lo there, my son!

Receive thou them, but first adore the Power
Whose name is Jealousy, that they may prove
To thee less full of trouble than they were
To me, and him who owned them ere I owned.

Neop. So be it, O ye Gods, to both of us;
And may we have a fair and prosperous voyage 780
Where God thinks right, and these our ships are bound.

Phil. I fear, O boy, lest all thy prayers be vain;
For now the dark blood, oozing from the depths,
Drops once again, and I await a change.

Ah! ah! ah me!

Fie on thee, foot, what evil wilt thou work?
It creeps, it comes again on me. Ah me!
O miserable me! Ye know it now:
Flee ye not from me—flee ye not, I pray!
O Kephallenian friend, would God this pain 790
Might fasten on thy breast, and pierce thee through!
Ah me! Once more, ah me! Ye generals twain,—
Thou, Agamemnon, Menelaos, thou,—
Would God ye both might bear this fell disease,
As long a time as I! Woe, woe is me!
O Death! O Death! why com'st thou not to me,
Thus summoned day by day continually?
And thou my son, brave boy, come, cast me in,
Consume me in this Lemnian fire,¹ dear boy, 800
By me so oft invoked. I too of old,

¹ The "Lemnian fire" is that of the volcano Mosychlos, which had become the type-instance of burning mountains to the Athenians after the conquest of the island by Miltiades. In what follows, Philoctetes refers to his kindling the funeral pyre of Heracles on Mount Ceta.

PHILOCTETES

For these his arms which now thou cherishest,
Thought meet to do this for the son of Zeus.
What say'st thou, boy? what say'st thou? Why not
speak?

Where go thy thoughts now?

Neop. Troubled sore long since,
Lamenting thy misfortunes.

Phil. Nay, O boy,
Be of good cheer. It comes upon me sharply,
And quickly goes away. Nay, leave me not,
I pray thee, here alone.

Neop. Fear not; we'll stay.

Phil. And wilt thou stay?

Neop. Deem that beyond all doubt. ⁸¹⁰

Phil. I do not care to bind thee by an oath.

Neop. I may not go from hence apart from thee.

Phil. Give me thy hand as pledge.

Neop. I give it thee

As pledge of our remaining.

Phil. [*Starting in agony.*] Take me there,
There, there, I say.

Neop. But whither meanest thou?

Phil. Above. . . .

Neop. [*Laying hold on PHILOCTETES.*] Why ravest thou,
and why dost gaze

Upon yon vault above us?

Phil. Let me go,

I tell thee; let me go!

Neop. Where shall I leave thee?

Phil. Leave me, I say, a while.

Neop. It may not be.

Phil. If thou but touch me, thou wilt work my
death.

Neop. [*Releasing him.*] And I will let thee go, if thou,
indeed,

Art calmer now.

PHILOCTETES

Phil. [*Throwing himself on the ground.*] O Earth, receive me here,

Just as I am, half-dead. This sore disease
No longer lets me hold myself upright. [*Falls asleep.* 820

Neop. Sleep, so 'twould seem, would make the man its own

In no long time ; for, lo ! his head droops back,
And drops of sweat from all his body fall,
And the dark vein from out his instep breaks,
Bursting with blood. But let us leave him here
In peace, that he may fall on sleep at last.

STROPHE

Chor. Come, blowing softly, Sleep, that know'st not pain,

Sleep, ignorant of grief,
Come softly, surely, kingly Sleep, and bless ;
Keep still before his eyes

*The band of light which lies upon them now. 830
Come, come, thou healing one :

And thou, my son, take heed
How thou or stand or stir,
And what new counsels lie before us now ;
Thou see'st him : wherefore, then,
Do we delay to act ?

Occasion guiding counsel, in all things,
If used at once, gains prize of victory.

Neop. [*In an altered tone, as if chanting an oracle.*] He,
indeed, heareth nought, and well I see that
all vainly,

Sailing off without him, we gain the spoil of his
weapons. [840

His are the glory and crown, him the God bade us bring
with us ;

And sore disgrace will it be, false boasting of task-work
unfinished.

PHILOCTETES

ANTISTROPHE

Chor. For this, my son, God's will shall well provide ;
 But what thou speak'st again
 Speak gently, O my son, speak gently now
 With 'bated breath, speak low.
 To all whom pain and sickness make their own,
 Sleep is but sleepless still,
 And quick to glance and see.
 But now, with all thy power,
 Look thou to that, to that, all secretly, 850
 See how thou best may'st work.
 Thou know'st well whom I serve ;
 And if thy measures be the same as his,
 *Then men of judgment look for troubles sore.

EPODE

The time is come, my son, the time is come
 All sightless, void of help,
 The man in darkness lies,
 (Right sound is sleep beneath the burning sun,) 860
 And stirs nor hand, nor foot, nor any limb,
 But seems like one in Hades stretched full length.
 Look to it well, and think if thou dost speak
 The things that suit the time.
 Far as my mind can grasp,
 The toil that brings no fear holds highest place.
Neop. I bid you hush, nor lose your wits in fear ;
 The man has oped his eyes, and lifts his head.
Phil. [*Waking.*] O light that follow'st sleep ! O help,
 my thoughts
 Had never dared to hope for from these strangers !
 For never had I dreamt, O boy, that thou
 With such true pity would'st endure to bear
 All these my sorrows, and remain, and help. 870
 The Atreidæ ne'er had heart to bear with them,
 As well as thou hast borne. Brave generals they !

PHILOCTETES

But thou, my son, who art of noble heart,
And sprung from noble-hearted ones, hast made
But light of all, though every sense be filled
With stench and shrieks. And now, since respite seems
At hand, and some refreshment after pain,
Do thou, my son, upraise me, steady me,
That when the pain shall leave me, we may make 880
Straight for the ship, and tarry not to sail.

Neop. Right glad am I to see, beyond all hopes,
That thou dost live and breathe, as free from pain ;
For, measured by the nature of thine ills,
Thy symptoms were of one who breathes no more.
But now rise up, or, if it please thee best,
These men shall bear thee, nor will grudge their toil,
Since this seems right to thee and me to do.

Phil. I thank thee, boy. Do thou, as thou dost say,
Upraise me ; but for these men, let them be,
Lest they too soon be sickened with the stench ; 890
To dwell with me on board is bad enough.

Neop. So shall it be ; but rise, and lean on me.

[*PHILOCTETES rises, with the help of NEOPTOLEMOS,
and walks, leaning on his arm.*]

Phil. Be not afraid ; long use will keep me straight.

Neop. [*Suddenly starting.*] O heavens ! what now remains for me to do ?

Phil. What ails thee, O my son ? What words are these ?

Neop. I know not how to speak my sore distress.

Phil. Distress from what ? Speak not such words,
my son.

Neop. And yet in that calamity I stand.

Phil. It cannot be my wound's foul noisomeness 900
Hath made thee loth to take me in thy ship ?

Neop. All things are noisome when a man deserts
His own true self, and does what is not meet.

Phil. But thou, at least, nor doest aught nor say'st,

PHILOCTETES

Unworthy of thy father's soul, when thou
Dost help a man right honest.

Neop. I shall seem
Basest of men. Long since this tortured me.

Phil. Not from thy deeds, but from thy words I shrink.

Neop. What shall I do, O Zeus? Once more be found
A villain, hiding things I should not hide,
And speaking words most shameful?

Phil. This man seems,
Unless my judgment errs, about to sail, 910
Betraying and deserting me.

Neop. Not so ;
'Tis not deserting thee that tortures me,
But lest I take thee to thine own distress.

Phil. What means this, boy? I do not grasp thy scope.

Neop. I will hide nought. Thou must to Troia sail,
To those Atreidæ and the Argive host.

Phil. Ah me! what say'st thou?

Neop. Groan not till thou know.

Phil. What knowledge? What mean'st thou to do
with me?

Neop. To save thee from this evil first, and then
With thee to go and ravage Troia's plains. 920

Phil. And dost thou think, indeed, to do all this?

Neop. A stern necessity compels; and thou,
Hear me, and be not angry.

Phil. I am lost,
Ah me! betrayed. What hast thou done to me,
O stranger? Give me back my bow again.

Neop. That may not be. To list to those that rule
Both with the right, and mine own good accords.

Phil. Thou fire, thou utter mischief, masterpiece
Of craft most hateful, how thou treated'st me,
Yea, how deceived'st! Art thou not ashamed,
Thou wretch, to look on me thy suppliant, 930
Fleeing to thee for succour? Taking these,

PHILOCTETES

My arrows, thou dost rob me of my life ;
Restore them, I beseech thee, I implore,
Restore them, O my son. By all the Gods
Thy fathers worshipped, rob me not of life.
Ah, wretched me ! He does not answer me,
But looks away as one who will not yield.
O creeks ! O cliffs out-jutting in the deep !
O all ye haunts of beasts that roam the hills,
O rocks that go sheer down, to you I wail,
(None other do I know to whom to speak,)
To you who were my old familiar friends,
The things this son of great Achilles does ;
Swearing that he would take me to my home
He takes me off to Troia ; giving me
His right hand as a pledge, he keeps my bow,
The bow of Heracles, the son of Zeus,
And fain would show me to the Argive host.
He takes me off by force, as though I were
In my full strength, and knows not that he slays
A dead, cold corpse, a very vapour's shade,
A phantom worthless. Never, were I strong,
Had he o'erpowered me ; even as I am
He had not caught me but by fraud ; but now
I have been tricked most vilely. What comes next ?
What must I do ? . . . Nay, give them back to me.
Be thyself once again. . . . What sayest thou ?
Thou 'rt silent . . . I, poor I, am now as nought.
O cave with double opening, once again
I enter thee stript bare, my means of life
Torn from me. I shall waste away alone
In this my dwelling, slaying with this bow
Nor wingèd bird, nor beast that roams the hills ;
But I myself, alas, shall give a meal
To those who gave me mine, and whom I chased
Now shall chase me ; and I, in misery,
Shall pay in death the penalty of death

946

950

PHILOCTETES

By me inflicted ; and all this is done
 By one who seemed to know no evil thought : 960
 Destruction seize thee. . . . Nay, not yet, till I
 Have learnt if thou wilt once more change thy mood ;
 If not, then may'st thou perish miserably !

Ghor. [*To* NEOPTOLEMOS.] What shall we do ? It rests
 with thee, O prince,
 To bid us sail, or with his words comply.

Neop. Not for the first time now, but long ago
 Has a strange pity seized me for this man.

Phil. Have mercy on me, boy, by all the Gods,
 And do not shame thyself by tricking me.

Neop. What shall I do ? Ah, would I ne'er had left
 My Skyros ! so great evils press on me. 970

Phil. Thou art not base thyself, but from the base
 Learning foul evil, thou, 'twould seem, did'st come :
 Now leaving it to those whom it befits,
 Sail on thy way . . . but first give back my arms.

Neop. [*To* Chorus.] What shall we do, friends ?

Enter ODYSSEUS, suddenly appearing from behind.

Odys. Wretch, what doest thou ?
 Wilt not go back, and give the bow to me ?

Phil. Ah ! Who is this ? Do I Odysseus hear ?

Odys. Know well, it is Odysseus that stands here ?

Phil. Woe ! woe ! I am entrapped, I am undone ;
 And was it he who snared me, filched mine arms ?

Odys. I and none other. I avow the deed. 980

Phil. [*To* NEOPTOLEMOS.] Dear boy, restore it ; give
 me back my bow.

Odys. That he shall not do, even though he wish ;
 Thou too go'st with them, or these men shall force thee.

Phil. What ? me ? thou basest and all-daring one ;
 And shall they force me ?

Odys. Yea, unless thou go
 Of thine own will.

PHILOCTETES

Phil. O land of Lemnos' isle,
O mightiest Fire by great Hephæstos wrought,¹
Can it be borne this man should bear me off
By force from thy dominions ?

Odys. Zeus, 'tis Zeus,
Know thou this well, that rules this land—that Zeus
Who wills these things ; I but his servant am. 990

Phil. O hateful wretch, what bold device is this ?
Sheltering thyself behind the Gods, thou mak'st
The Gods as liars.

Odys. Nay, not so, but true ;
At any rate this journey thou must go.

Phil. No, that I will not.

Odys. Yes, thou shalt : obey !

Phil. Ah, miserable me ! 'Tis clear our sire
Begot us not as freemen, but as slaves.

Odys. Nay, nay, not so, but equal with the best,
With whom thou too must Troia take and sack,
And raze it to the ground.

Phil. [*Rushing to a projecting point of the cliff.*] That
ne'er shall be,
Not though I needs must suffer every ill,
While yet this beetling crag is left to me. 1000

Odys. What wilt thou do ?

Phil. From this rock throw myself,
And dash my head upon the rock below.

Odys. [*To the Sailors.*] Quick, hold him fast. Prevent
his doing it.

[*Sailors seize PHILOCTETES, and bind his
hands behind his back.*]

Phil. O hands ! What shame ye suffer, lacking now
The bow-string that ye loved so well, and thus
Made prisoners by this man ! O thou, whose soul

¹ The "fire" is again that of the volcano, which was believed to come from the forge at which Hephæstos laboured in the heart of the mountain.

PHILOCTETES

Has never known a generous, healthy thought,
 How hast thou tricked me, ta'en me in a snare,
 Putting this boy I knew not, as thy blind,
 Unmeet for thee, for me of meetest mood,
 Who nothing knew except to do his task : 1010
 And, clearly, now he grieves, sore vexed at heart,
 At all his faults, at all my sufferings.
 But thy base soul, that ever peeps and spies
 Through chinks and crannies, taught him but too well,
 Guileless and all unwilling as he was,
 The subtlety of fraud. And now thou think'st,
 O wretch, to bind and take me from these shores,
 Where thou did'st cast me forth, in friendless case,
 Lonely and homeless, dead to all that live.
 Perdition seize thee ! That I oft have prayed,
 But since the Gods grant nought that pleases me, 1020
 Thou laugh'st and liv'st, and I am vexed at heart
 At this same thing, that I live on in woe
 With many evils, flouted at by thee,
 And those two chiefs, the Atreidæ whom thou serv'st:
 And yet thou sailed'st with them by constraint,
 By tricks fast bound, while me, poor wretch, (who sailed
 With seven good ships, of mine own will,) they cast,
 (So thou say'st, but they say the deed was thine,)
 Dishonoured forth. And now why take ye me ?
 Why drag me off ? What aim have ye in this ?
 I, who am nothing, long since dead to you, 1030
 Yea, am I not, O thou abhorred of Gods,
 Lame, and ill-savoured ? How, if I should sail,
 Could ye unto the Gods burn sacrifice,
 Or pour libation ? 'Twas on that pretence
 Ye cast me forth. Perdition seize you all !
 And it shall seize you, seeing ye have wronged
 Him who stands here, if yet the Gods regard
 Or right, or truth. And full assured am I
 They do regard them. For ye ne'er had come

PHILOCTETES

On this your errand for a wretch like me,
Unless the pricks of heaven-sent yearning for him
Had spurred you on. But, O my fatherland,
And all ye Gods who look on me, avenge,
Avenge me on them all in time to come,
If ye have pity on me. Piteously

1040

As now I live, if I could see them smitten,
I then should deem my long disease was healed.

Ghor. Sore vexed is he ; sore words the stranger speaks,
Not yielding, O Odysseus, to his ills.

Odys. I might say much in answer to his words,
If there were time. Now this one word I speak :
Where men like this are wanted, such am I ;
But when the time for good and just men calls,
Thou could'st not find a godlier man than me.

1050

In every case it is my bent to win ;
Except with thee. To thee of mine own will
I yield the victory. Ho, leave him there !
Lay no hand on him, let him here remain.
With these thy arms we have no need of thee :
Teucros is with us, skilled in this thine art ;
And I, too, boast that I, not less than thou,
This bow can handle, with my hand shoot straight ;
What need we thee ? In Lemnos walk at will ;
And let us go. And they perchance will give
As prize to me what rightly thou might'st claim.

1060

Phil. Ah me ! And what shall I, unhappy, do ?
And wilt thou then among the Argives go,
Equipped with my arms ?

Odys. Speak thou not a word
To me, who stand in very act to go.

Phil. And thou, Achilles' son, shall I remain
Without a word from thee ? Dost thou thus go ?

Odys. [*To NEOPTOLEMOS.*] Go thou, and look not on
him, lest, though noble,
Thou ruin our success.

PHILOCTETES

Phil. [To Chorus.] And will ye leave,
O strangers, will ye leave me, pitying not? 1070

Chor. [To PHILOCTETES.] This youth is our commander, and whate'er

He speaks to thee, the same we also say.

Neop. [To Chorus, *pointing to ODYSSEUS.*] I shall be
told, I know, by our chief here,

That I am piteous and of melting mood;

Yet, spite of this, remain, if so he will,

At least a while, until the sailors put

Our sailing gear in order, and we have made

Due prayers unto the Gods. So he, [*pointing to PHILOCTETES*] perchance,

Meantime may cherish better thoughts of us.

Now then, let us depart, and ye, be quick,

When we shall call you, to proceed with us. 1080

[*Exeunt* NEOPTOLEMOS and ODYSSEUS.]

STROPHE I

Phil. O cave of hollow rock,

Now hot, now icy cold,

And I was doomed, ah me!

To leave thee never more;

But e'en in death thou still wilt be to me

My one true helping friend.

O woe, woe, woe!

O home most full of grief,

My grief, me miserable!

What now shall come to me

As day succeeds to day?

Whence shall I, in my woe,

Find hope of food to live?

Ah, now the swift-winged birds

*Will soar in loftiest flight,

*High through the whistling wind;

For I am powerless. 1090

PHILOCTETES

Chor. Thou, thou thyself, O man of many woes,
Hast brought them on thyself;
It is not from a Power above thine own
This ill fate falls on thee,
Since thou, when wisdom was at hand, didst choose,
Thy better genius scorned, to praise the worse. 1100

ANTISTROPHE I

Phil. O miserable me !
Outraged with foulest wrong,
Who for the years to come
In woe, no helper near,
Shall henceforth, dwelling here, consume away,
(Ah me ! ah me !)
Gaining no food for life
From those my swift-winged darts,
With firm hands grasping them ; 1110
But unsuspected words
Of guileful mind deceived ;
Would I might see the man
Whose heart devised these things,
Bearing these pains of mine
As long as I have borne !

Chor. Fate was it, fate that cometh of the Gods,
Not guile, that brought thee thus
Within my power ; on others launch thy curse, 1120
Baleful, and fraught with ill.
This is the care that I have most at heart,
That thou should'st not true friendship thrust aside.

STROPHE II

Phil. Ah, woe is me ! he sits,
Where the shore is white with waves,
And laughs within himself,
And tosses in his hands
What fed my wretched life,
By none else borne till now.

PHILOCTETES

O bow, of me beloved,
Torn from my loving grasp,
Surely, if thou can'st feel,
Thou lookest piteously 1130
On me, the bosom friend of Heracles,
Who never more shall bend thee as of old ;
But now thou changest hands,
Art wielded by a man of many wiles,
And seest foul deceits,
A man thou needs must loathe and execrate,
Ten thousand plots from shameful deeds upspringing,
*Such as none else contrived.
Chor. 'Tis a man's part to say that good is right, 1140
But having said it out,
Not to thrust forth his carping grief in speech.
He was but one, by many set to work,
And yielding to their will,
Hath wrought a common good for all his friends.

ANTISTROPHE II

Phil. O all ye wingèd game,
And tribes of bright-eyed deer,
Who on these high lawns fed,
No more from this my home
Will ye allure me forth. 1150
I wield not in my hands
The strength I had of old
(Ah me!) from those my darts ;
Full carelessly this place
Is barred against you now,
No longer fearful ; come ye, now 'tis well
That ye in turn should glut your ravenous maw
With this my spotted flesh.
Soon I shall end my life ; for whence can I
Find means withal to live ?
Who thus can feed upon the empty winds, 1160

PHILOCTETES

Gaining no more what earth brings forth to men,
The giver of their life ?

Chor. Ah, by the Gods, if thou dost still regard
A true friend's claim on thee,

Draw near to him who draweth near to thee
With every word of friendliness ; but know,

Know well, it rests with thee

To 'scape from this thy grief.

Sad is 't to feed that woe,

And, yet unschooled, to bear the thousand ills

That with it company.

Phil. Again, again thou hintest at a grief

1170

That vexed me sore long since ;

Thou best of all that ever tarried here,

Why did'st thou lay me low ? why work my doom ?

Chor. Why speak'st thou thus ?

Phil. In that thou thought'st to take me once again

To Troas, which I hate.

Chor. This seems to me far better.

Phil.

Leave me ; leave.

Chor. Welcome, right welcome are the things thou
say'st.

And we desire to do them. Let us go,

Come, let us go, and each his own set place

1180

Take in our ship.

Phil.

By Zeus, who hears

The prayers of those that curse, go not, I pray.

Chor. Be calm, be calm.

Phil.

O friends, by all the Gods,

I pray you tarry.

Chor.

Why this eager cry ?

Phil. Ah me ! ah me ! O God, O God, I die,

Die in my misery !

O foot, O foot, what shall I do with thee

Henceforth in this my woe ?

O friends, come back, and tarry once again.

1190

PHILOCTETES

Chor. What should we come to do
With any hope of altered purpose here,
Other than that thou showed'st to us before ?

Phil. Ye must not be too wroth
That one so tempest-tost with stormy grief
Should speak against his better, truer thoughts.

Chor. Come, then, poor sufferer, as we bid thee come.

Phil. Never, yea, nevermore, be sure of that ;
Not though the fiery thunderbolt that falls
With sudden blaze of light,
Should burn me with its dreaded lightning-flash.
Yea, perish Ilion ; with it perish there
Those that could dare cast forth this foot of mine.
But oh, my friends, grant me at least one prayer.

1200

Chor. What is 't thou askest ?

Phil. Give me but a sword,
If thou hast one, or axe, or any weapon.

Chor. What deed of prowess wilt thou work with them ?

Phil. I will strike off my head, and lop my limbs ;
My soul thirsts eagerly for blood, for blood.

Chor. But why is this ?

Phil. I, o, I my father seek.

1210

Chor. Where wilt thou go ?

Phil. To Hades, for he lives

No longer in this light.
O city, city of my fathers, fain,
All wretched though I be,
Fain would I see thee still !
I who thy sacred stream¹
Did leave to help my foes the Danai ;
And now I am as nought.

Chor. Long since had I been making for my ship,
Had I not seen Odysseus drawing nigh,
And, coming with him, great Achilles' son.

1220

[PHILOCTETES retires into his cave

¹ The "sacred stream" is the Spercheios. Comp. l. 726.

PHILOCTETES

Enter NEOPTOLEMOS, *followed by* ODYSSEUS.

- Odys.* Wilt thou not tell me why so quick thou
speed'st,
Turning thy steps upon a backward way?
Neop. I go to undo the wrongs I did before.
Odys. Thou speakest strangely. And what wrong was
there?
Neop. That I, obeying thee and all the host
Odys. What did'st thou do that was not right for thee?
Neop. I tricked a man with shameful fraud and guile.
Odys. Think what he was. What fancy strange is
this? [1230
Neop. 'Tis no strange fancy, but to Pœas' son
Odys. What wilt thou do? A fear comes over me.
Neop. From whom I took this bow, to him again
Odys. O Zeus, what now? Thou wilt not give it
him?
Neop. Yea, for I gained it basely, not of right.
Odys. By all the Gods, dost thou say this to mock me?
Neop. If it be mockery but to speak the truth.
Odys. Son of Achilles, what is this thou say'st?
Neop. Shall I then twice or thrice repeat the words?
Odys. I had not wished to hear them even once.
Neop. Know, thou hast heard whate'er I had to say. 1240
Odys. There is one, yea, there is, will stop thy deed.
Neop. What say'st thou? Who shall stop my doing it?
Odys. The whole Achæan host, and I with them.
Neop. Wise though thou be, thou dost not wisely
speak.
Odys. Thou neither speakest wise things nor devisest.
Neop. If they be just, then are they more than wise.
Odys. And how can it be just to cast away
That which my counsels gave thee?
Neop. Having sinned
A shameful sin, I now would make amends.

PHILOCTETES

Odys. And fear'st thou not the Achæan host, doing
this? 1250

Neop. My cause being just, I share not that thy fear;
[*ODYSSEUS prepares to attack NEOPTOLEMOS.*
Nor will I yield to this thy violence.

Odys. Not with the Troïans, then, I fight, but thee.

Neop. What must be, let it.

Odys. [*Laying hand on his sword.*] Ha! And dost
thou see

My right hand grasp the hilt?

Neop. [*Drawing his sword.*] See then that I
Can do the same as thou, in act, not threat.

Odys. I then will let thee go, but to the host
I will tell this, and they shall punish thee.

Neop. Thou 'rt wise in time; and should'st thou keep
that mind,

Thou may'st perchance thy foot keep out of harm. 1260

[*ODYSSEUS retires.*

Ho, Philoctetes! Ho there, Pœas' son,
Come forth, and leave this rocky roof of thine.

Phil. What noise of shouting make ye at my cave?
Why call ye me? What want ye, strangers, here?

Alas, 'tis something evil. Are ye come
To bring fresh evils upon evils on me?

Neop. Be of good cheer, and list to what I speak.

Phil. Nay, but I fear: 'twas by fair words before
That I fared foully, by thy words deceived.

Neop. And is repentance, then, impossible? 1270

Phil. Such wast thou then, when thou did'st steal my
bow,

Faithful in words, within all treacherous.

Neop. But not so now: I wish to hear from thee,
Whether thy mind is fixed to tarry here,
Or sail with us.

Phil. Stop, stop; not one word more:
All that thou speakest will be said in vain.

PHILOCTETES

Neop. Is this thy mind ?

Phil. Yet stronger than I speak.

Neop. I would that thou had'st hearkened to my words ;
But if I chance to speak unseasonably,
I hold my peace.

Phil. Thou wilt say all in vain,
For never shalt thou turn my mind to thee,
Who, taking from me that which gave me life,
Did'st basely rob me of it, and now com'st,
And givest me thy counsel, basest son
Of noblest father. May ye perish all,
And chiefly the Atreidæ ; after them,
Laertes' son and thou !

1286

Neop. [*Holding out the bow.*] Curse thou no more,
But from my hand receive these weapons back.

Phil. How say'st thou ? Are we tricked a second
time ?

Neop. No, by the holy might of highest Zeus !

Phil. O words most welcome, if they be but true ! 1290

Neop. Our acts shall make them clear ; do thou put
forth

Thy right hand, and be master of thine arms.

[*As he is giving the bow, ODYSSEUS appears
from behind.*]

Odys. That I forbid, the Gods my witnesses,
In name of the Atreidæ, and the host.

Phil. Whose voice, my son, was that ? What ? Did I
hear

Odysseus speak ?

Odys. E'en so, thou see'st him near,
Who by main force will bear thee off to 'Troy,
Whether Achilles' son shall please or no.

Phil. [*Bending his bow.*] But to thy cost, if this dart
does not miss.

Neop. [*Staying his arm.*] Oh, by the Gods, I pray thee
shoot it not ! 1300

PHILOCTETES

Phil. Let loose my hand, I pray thee, dearest boy.

Neop. I will not let thee go.

Phil. Fie on thee! Why
Did'st hinder me from slaying with my dart
A man I hate, my bitter enemy?

[*ODYSSEUS steals away.*]

Neop. That were not good for me, nor yet for thee.

Phil. Know this then, that the chief of all the host,
The Achæans' lying heralds, they are cowards
In brunt of fight, though overbold of speech.

Neop. Well, be it so. But thou hast now thy bow,
And hast no cause for wrath or blaming me.

Phil. I own it. Thou, dear boy, hast shown the
stock

From which thou springest, not from Sisypnos, 1314
But from Achilles, who alive was held
Of highest fame, and is so with the dead.

Neop. It gives me joy to hear thee praise my father,
Praising me also; but what now I wish
Hear thou, I pray thee. Mortals needs must bear
The chances which the Gods on high shall give;
But those who fall upon self-chosen ills,
As thou hast fallen, they have little claim

To pardon or compassion. Thou art fierce, 1320
And wilt not list to one who counsels thee;
And if one give advice in pure good will,
Thou hatest him, and deemest him a foe.

Yet I will speak, invoking holy Zeus,
The guardian of all oaths. Be sure of this,
And write it in the tablets of thy mind,
Thy pain has come to thee by heaven-sent chance,
In that thou cam'st too near to Chryse's guard,
The serpent who in secret keeps his watch
Over the unroofed precincts of her shrine;
And know that thou shalt find no respite here
From this thy sore disease, while yet yon sun

1330

PHILOCTETES

Rises on this side, sets again on that,
 Until thou journey of thine own free will
 To Troïa's plains, and meeting there with those
 Who call Asclepios father,¹ shalt be healed
 Of thy disease, and shalt with these thy darts,
 And with my help, lay low its ancient Towers.
 And I will tell thee how I know these things
 Stand thus ordained ; for we a prophet have,
 Taken from Troïa, noblest seer of all,
 And Helenos his name, who clearly saith
 That these things so must be ; and further yet,
 That it is doomed, this very harvest tide, 1840
 That Troïa should be taken utterly ;
 And should he prove false prophet, in our hands
 He placed his life. And since thou knowest this,
 Of thy free will consent ; for great the gain,
 Being judged the noblest one of Hellenes all,
 To find skilled hands to heal thee, and to gain,
 Sacking loud-wailing Troïa, highest praise.

Phil. O hateful life, why, why detain'st thou me
 In day's clear light, and dost not let me go
 To Hades dark ? Ah me ! what shall I do ?
 How shall I prove distrustful to his words, 1850
 Who gives me counsel out of kindly thought ?
 Yet must I yield ? And how shall I, ill-starred,
 Do this, and then look up ? From whom shall I
 Hear greeting kind ? How will ye, O mine eyes,
 That watch all varying chances of my life,
 How will ye bear to see me living on
 With those Atreidæ who have ruined me,
 Or with that vilest son of Lartios ?
 It is not now the sorrow of the past
 That chiefly gnaws, but what I seem to see
 With prophet's glance I yet am doomed to bear

¹ The two sons of Asclepios, Machaon and Podaleirios, appear in the *Iliad* (ii. 731) as the great surgeons of the Hellenic army.

PHILOCTETES

From these same foes ; for those whose soul becomes ¹³⁶⁰
 Mother of evil, them it trains to be
 Evil in all things. And 'tis this that moves
 My wonder at thee ; for 'twas meet that thou
 Should'st ne'er to Troïa come thyself, and next
 Should'st keep us from them who so outraged thee,
 And robbed thee of thy father's treasured arms,
 [And slighting Aias, to Odysseus gave them ;]
 *And art thou their ally, and wilt constrain
 Me to their will ? Nay, nay, not so, my son ;
 But, as thou swarest, send me to my home,
 While thou, in Skyros tarrying, leavest them,
 Evil of heart, to die an evil death.
 And thus wilt thou gain double thanks from me, ¹³⁷⁰
 And double from my father, nor wilt seem,
 Helping the base, to be as base thyself.

Neop. Thou speakest what shows fair, and yet I wish
 That thou should'st trust the Gods, and these my
 words,
 And sail from these shores, I thy friend with thee.

Phil. What ! with this wretched foot to Troïa's
 plains,
 And Atreus' son, my bitterest foe of all ?

Neop. Nay, but to those who 'll free thy ulcerous foot
 From pain, and save thee from thy sore disease.

Phil. What mean'st thou, friend, who givest counsel
 strange ? ¹³⁸⁰

Neop. That which I see works best for both of us.

Phil. Hast thou no awe of Gods, who say'st such
 words !

Neop. What cause of shame is there in gaining
 good ?

Phil. And speak'st thou of the Atreidæ's good, or
 mine ?

Neop. Thine, for I am thy friend, and such my
 speech.

PHILOCTETES

Phil. How so, when thou would'st give me to my foes ?

Neop. Learn thou, my friend, to be less rash in ills.

Phil. I know thou wilt destroy me with these words.

Neop. Nay, nay, not so ; thou dost not understand.

Phil. Do I not know the Atreidæ cast me forth ? ¹³⁹⁰

Neop. But if they save, who cast thee forth, look to it.

Phil. Ne'er with my will shall I on Troïa look.

Neop. What then remains, if we, with all our words,
Still fail to move thee ? Easiest course it were
For me to cease from speaking, and that thou
Should'st live, as now, without deliverance.

Phil. Leave me to suffer what I suffer must ;
But what thou swarest, thy right hand as pledge,
To lead me to my home, that do, my son,
And linger not, nor further mention make
Of Troïa to me. I have had my fill
Of wailing and lament.

1400

Neop. If this thy will,
Come, let us go.

Phil. Now speak'st thou noble words.

Neop. Plant thy foot firm.

Phil. With what small strength I have.

Neop. How shall I 'scape the Achæans' blame ?

Phil. Despise it.

Neop. And what if they shall lay my country waste ?

Phil. I shall be there.

Neop. What would thy help avail ?

Phil. With these the darts of Heracles. . . .

Neop. What then ?

Phil. I will restrain their coming.

On then, take

Thy farewell of this island.

HERACLES *appears, descending from the sky, in glory.*

Hera. Nay, not yet ;

PHILOCTETES

Not till thou hear our words,
 Thou son of Pœas old ; 1410
 Own that thou hear'st the voice of Heracles
 And look'st upon his face.
 Lo, for thy sake I come,
 Leaving my heavenly home,
 To tell thee of the thoughts of Zeus on high,
 And to close up the way
 On which thou journeyest now.
 List thou to these my words :
 And first my own life's chances I will tell,
 The labours I endured, through which I passed
 And gained immortal greatness as thou see'st : 1420
 And this, be sure, shall be thy destined lot,
 After these woes to live a noble life ;
 And going with this youth to Troïa's town,
 First thou shalt respite find from thy sore plague,
 And for thy valour chosen from the host,
 Shalt with my arrows take away the life
 Of Paris, who was cause of all these ills,
 And shalt sack Troïa, and shalt send its spoils
 To thine own dwelling (gaining highest prize
 Of valour in the army) by the plains 1430
 Of Cœta, where thy father Pœas dwells.
 And all the spoils thou gainest in this war,
 As true thank-offerings for these darts of mine,
 Lay thou upon my grave. And now [To NEOPTOLEMOS]
 to thee,
 Achilles' son, I this declare ;—nor thou,
 Apart from him, nor he apart from thee,
 May Troïa take. But ye, as lions twain
 That roam together, guard thou him, he thee.
 And I will send, [To PHILOCTETES] as healer of thy
 wounds,
 Asclepios to Ilion. Yet once more
 By this my bow must it be captured. Then,

PHILOCTETES

(Give heed to this,) when ye the land lay waste, 1440
 Shew all religious reverence to the Gods ;
 For all things else our father Zeus counts less :
 [Religion e'en in death abides with men ;
 Die they or live, it does not pass away.]

Phil. O thou, who utterest voice,
 By me long yearnèd for,
 Who now at length art seen,
 I will not to thy words rebellious prove.

Neop. I too give my assent.

Hera. Delay not now to act ; 1450
 For time and wind press on,
 And speed you on your way.

Phil. Come, then, I leave this isle,
 And speak my parting words:

Farewell, O roof, long time
 My one true guard and friend ;
 And ye, O nymphs that sport
 In waters or in fields ;

Strong roar of waves that break
 On jutting promontory,

Where oft my head was wet,
 (Though hid in far recess,)

With blasts of stormy South ;
 And oft the mount that bears

The name of Hermes¹ gave 1460
 Its hollow, loud lament,

Echoing my stormy woe ;
 And now, ye streams and fount,
 Lykian, where haunt the wolves,

We leave you, leave you now,
 Who ne'er had dreamt of this.

Farewell, O Lemnos, girt by waters round,
 With fair breeze send me on

¹ Hermes, as one of the Cabeiri, the special deities of Lemno and Imbros.

PHILOCTETES

Right well, that none may blame,
Where Fate, the mighty, leads,
Counsel of friends, and God,
Who worketh this in might invincible.

Chor. On then, with one accord,
To the sea Nymphs offering our prayer,
That they come as helpers and friends,
In the voyage of the homeward bound.

1470

FRAGMENTS

11¹

HAST thou done fearful evil? Thou must bear
Evil as fearful; and the holy light
Of righteousness shines clearly.

12

Kings wisdom gain, consorting with the wise.

13

Man is but breath and shadow, nothing more.

14

The mightiest and the wisest in their minds
Thou may'st see like to him who standeth here,
Giving good counsel to a man distressed;
But when God's will shall send the scourge on one
Who lived till then as fortune's favourite,
All his fine phrases vanish utterly.

35

'Neath every stone there lies a scorpion hid.

58

Hark! some one cries. . . . Or do I vainly call?
The man who fears hears noise on every side.

59

Be sure, no lie can ever reach old age.

¹ The numerals refer to Dindorf's Edition.

FRAGMENTS

61

A maiden too, and one of Argive race,
Whose glory lies in fewest words or none.

62

Short speech becomes the wise of heart and good
To parents who begat and bore and bred.

63

Be of good cheer, O lady : dangers oft,
Though blowing dreams by night, are lulled by day.

64

None cleave to life so fondly as the old.

65

Life, O my son, is sweetest boon of all :
It is not given to men to taste death twice.

66

*The living should not glory o'er the dead,
As knowing well that he himself must die.

67

How all men seek to shun the tyrant's face !

88

A soul with good intent and purpose just
Discerns far more than lecturer can teach.

89

Much wisdom often goes with fewest words.

90

A man whose whole delight is still to talk
Knows not how much he vexes all his friends.

FRAGMENTS

91

If thou art noble, as thou say'st thyself,
Tell me from whence thou 'rt sprung. No speech can
 stain
What comes of noble nature, nobly born.

92

Thy speech is worthy, not too harshly said;
A noble stock that bears the test of proof,
Will still gain fair repute beyond all blame.

93

Who can count man's prosperity as great,
Or small and lowly, or of no account?
None of all this continues in one stay.

94

Strange is it that the godless, who have sprung
From evil-doers, should fare prosperously,
While good men, born of noble stock, should be
By adverse fortune vexed. It was ill done
For the Gods thus to order lives of men.
What ought to be is this, that godly souls
Should from the Gods gain some clear recompense,
And the unjust pay some clear penalty;
So none would prosper who are base of soul.

98

Then does men's life become one vast disease,
When once they seek their ills by ills to cure.

99

Not easy is it to resist the just.

100

Deceit is base, unfit for noble souls.

FRAGMENTS

101

A righteous tongue has with it mightiest strength.

102

Hush, boy ! for silence brings a thousand gains.

103

Why tellest thou thy tale of many words ?
Superfluous speech is irksome everywhere.

104

In some things be not anxious to inquire :
Far better is it oft to leave them hid.

105

I know not how to answer to these things.
 When good men by the base
 Are overcome in strife,
What city could endure such deeds as this ?

106

No one, I trow ; yet take good heed to this,
Lest it be better, e'en by godless deeds,
To triumph over foes than as a slave
To yield obedience.

107

Cease thou. Enough for me the name of son
Of such a father, if indeed I 'm his :
And if I be not, small the injury ;
Repute oft triumphs o'er the truth itself.

108

The bastard is as strong as lawful sons ;
Goodness still claims a rank legitimate.

109

Riches gain friends, gain honours,—further still,
Gain highest sovereignty for those who sit

FRAGMENTS

In low estate. The rich have no men foes ;
And if they have, these still conceal their hate.
A wondrous power has wealth to wind its way
Or on plain ground, or heights that none may tread,
Where one that's poor, although 'twere close at hand
Would fail to gain the thing his heart desires.
The form unsightly and of no esteem
It makes both wise of speech and fair to see :
It only has the power of joy or grief,
It only knows the art of hiding ill.

162

A pleasant ill is this disease of love,
And 'twere not ill to sketch its likeness thus :
When sharp cold spreads through all the æther clear,
And children seize a crystal icicle,
At first they firmly hold their new-found joy ;
But in the end the melting mass nor cares
To slip away, nor is it good to keep :
So those that love, the self-same strong desire
Now leads to action, now to idleness.

202

What virtue gains alone abides with us.

203

The hearts of good men are not quickly bowed.

204

Still where the right of free, true speech is gone,
And the worse counsel in a state prevails,
Blunders make shipwreck of security.

205

And how can I, a mortal, fight with fate
That comes from heaven, when danger presses hard,
And hope helps not ?

163

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FRAGMENTS

255

I own it true. Right well the proverb runs,
That smallest things make known a man's true bent.

284

Wherefore conceal thou nothing. Time that sees
And heareth all things bringeth all to light.

288

No good e'er comes of leisure purposeless ;
And Heaven ne'er helps the men who will not act.

298

'Tis only in God's garden men may reap
True joy and blessing.

302

Chance never helps the men who do not work.

304

He who neglects the Muses in his youth
Has wasted all the past, and lost true life
For all the future.

311

A mortal man should think things fit for men.

321

This is most grievous, when it might be ours
To set things straight, and we by our own act
Will bring fresh woe and trouble on our heads.

322

But he who dares to look at danger straight,
His speech is clear, his spirit falters not.

FRAGMENTS

323

It is not good to lie ; but when the truth
Brings on a man destruction terrible,
He may be pardoned though not good his speech.

325

And wonder not, O prince, that thus I cling
So close to gain ; for they whose life is long
Still cleave to profit with their might and main,
And men count all things else as less than wealth ;
And though there be that praise a life kept free
From all disease, to me no poor man seems
In that blest state, but sick continually.

326

The noblest life is that of righteousness ;
The best, one free from sickness ; sweetest far
To have each day the fill of all we wish.

342

Now in the gates Æneas, Goddess-born,
Is seen, and on his shoulders bears his sire,
Who lets his byssine mantle fall in folds
On back where smote the fiery levin-flash,
And gathers round him all his band of slaves ;
Beyond all hope, the multitude draws near
Of Phrygians who would fain be emigrants.

343

But little count we make of toil gone by.

358

For those who fare but ill 'tis very sweet
E'en for a moment to forget their ills.

359

None has no sorrow ; happiest who has least.

FRAGMENTS

379

He¹ 'twas that taught the Argive army first
To build their walls, and found inventions strange
Of measures, weights, and numbers ; he the first
To plan the ten that upward rise from one,
And from the tens to fifties pass, and so
From thence to thousands. He alone devised
The army's beacon-lights and nightly watch,
And signals of the morning, and made clear
What he did not devise. He brought to sight
The measures and the motions of the stars,
And all their order, and the heavenly signs,
And for the men who guide their ships on sea,
The Great Bear's circle, and the Dog's cold setting.

380

Did he not drive away the famine from them ;
And, with God's help, discover pastimes wise,
As they sat down, after long toil at sea—
Draughts, and dice too, sweet help for idleness ?

419

But when an oath is added, then the soul
Is made more careful, having then to shun
Both blame of friends and sin against the Gods.

434

The aged man becomes a child again.

436

'Tis better not to be than vilely live.

498

War ever takes our young men in its net.

¹ Palamedes.

FRAGMENTS

499

A weary life is that the sailors lead,
To whom no gift from Heaven or Fortune sent
Could offer worthy recompense. Poor souls,
Adventuring traffic far on slender chance,
They save, or gain, or lose all utterly.

500

All evil things are found in length of years;
Sense gone, work useless, thoughts and counsels vain.

501

If men by tears could heal their several ills,
And by their weeping bring the dead to life,
Then gold would be of far less price than tears.

512

Greedy of gain is every barbarous tribe.

513

Be not afraid : speak thou the truth, and then
Thou shalt not fail.

514

What man soe'er, in troubles waxing wroth,
Will use a cure that's worse than the disease,
Is no physician skilled to deal with grief.

517

I by myself am nought ; yea, oftentimes
So look I upon all our womankind,
That we are nothing. Young, we lead a life
Of all most joyous, in our father's house,
For want of knowledge is our kindly nurse ;
But when we come to marriageable years,
Then are we pushed and bartered for away

FRAGMENTS

470
From household gods and from our parents dear—
Some unto alien husbands, some to men
Of stranger race, and some to homes full strange,
Or full of turmoil: and when one night binds us,
We needs must bear, and think of it as right.

518

Among mankind we all are born alike
Of father and of mother. None excels
Another in his nature, but the fate
Of evil chance holds some of us, and some
Good fortune favours, and necessity
Holds some in bondage.

520

Praise no man much until thou see his death.

535

Within the tablets of thy mind write this
That I have said to thee.

563

Well, well, what greater joy could'st thou receive
Than touching land, and then, beneath a roof,
With slumbering mind to hear the pelting storm?

572

We should not speak of one that prospers well
As happy, till his life have run its course,
And reached its goal. An evil spirit's gift
In shortest time has oft laid low the state
Of one full rich in great prosperity,
When the change comes, and so the Gods appoint.

582

No one who sins against his will is base.

FRAGMENTS

585

Tell not to many what Fate sends on thee :
'Tis comelier far in silence to lament.

588

I mourn for those my locks as young mare doth,
Who, caught by shepherds, in the stable stands,
And with rough hands has all her chestnut mane
Cropped off, and then is led in meadow fair,
Which clear streams water, and when thus she sees
Her likeness, with her hair thus foully cropped,
Ah, one hard-hearted well might pity her,
Crouching in shame, as maddened with disgrace,
Mourning and weeping o'er the mane that 's gone.

606

Ne'er can a state be well and safely ruled,
In which all justice and all purity
Are trampled under foot, and brawling knave
With cruel goad drives the poor state to death.

607

Not mortal men alone does Love assail,
No, nor yet women, but it leaves its stamp
Upon the souls of Gods, and passes on
To mighty ocean. Zeus omnipotent
Is powerless to avert it, and submits
And yields full willingly.

608

No greater evil can a man endure
Than a bad wife, nor find a greater good
Than one both good and wise; and each man speaks
As judging by the experience of his life.

609

Forgive me, and be silent, patiently ;

FRAGMENTS

For that which to us women bringeth shame
One ought in women's presence to conceal.

610

Would'st thou count up the roll of happy men,
Thou shalt not find one mortal truly blest.

611

Ah, women ! no one can escape disgrace
On whom Zeus sendeth ills in armed array ;
And heaven-sent plagues we still must bear performe.

612

Sons are the anchors of a mother's life.

622

Thou art but young ; and thou hast much to learn,
And many things to hear and understand :
Seek still to add fresh knowledge profitable.

626

Death comes, the last great healer of all ills.

649

Ah, boy ! 'tis just the noble and the good
That Ares loves to slay. The bold in tongue,
Shunning all pain, are out of danger's reach ;
For Ares careth not for coward souls.

657

Time, stripping off the veil, brings all to light.

658

Time, even Time, in all the vast expanse
Of this our human life,
Finds plenteous wisdom for the souls that seek.

FRAGMENTS

659

But when the Gods would hide the things of heaven,
Thou can'st not learn, although thou travel far.

660

One wise man is no match for many fools.

661

A good man still will succour the distressed.

662

True wisdom ranks among the Gods most high.

663

They that fare ill become not only deaf,
But, even though they gaze, they see not clear
What lies before them.

.

Sore evil still, and all unmanageable,
Is want of knowledge. Folly proves itself
Of wickedness true sister.

664

We cannot speak good words of deeds not good.

665

We should not joy in pleasures that bring shame.

666

Fortune ne'er helps the man whose courage fails.

667

Shame brings but little help in evil things;
Your silence is the talker's best ally.

FRAGMENTS

668

What means this praise ? The man who yields to wine
Is void of understanding, slave to wrath,
And wont, though babbling many words and vain,
To hear full loth what eagerly he spoke.

669

When one is found as taken in the act
Of fraud and wrong, whate'er his skill of speech,
The only course for him is silence then ;
Yet that is hard to bear for one who feels
Conscious of innocence.

670

In vows, forsooth, a woman shuns the pangs
And pains of childbirth ; but the evil o'er,
Once more she comes within the self-same net,
O'ercome by that strong passion of her soul.

671

No oath weighs aught on one of scoundrel soul.

672

When trouble ceases e'en our troubles please.

674

Where fathers are by children overcome,
That is no city of the wise and good,

'Tis best, where'er we are, to follow still
The customs of the country.

675

He to whom men pay honour's noble meed
Has need of noble deeds innumerable,
And out of easy conflict there can come
But little glory.

FRAGMENTS

676

Counsels are mightier things than strength of hands.

677

My body is enslaved, my mind is free.

678

Not Kyprian only, children, is she called,
Who rules o'er Kypros, but bears many names.
Hades is she, and Might imperishable,
And raving Madness, and untamed Desire,
And bitter Lamentation. All is hers,
Or earnest, or in calm, or passionate ;
For still where'er is life she winds within
The inmost heart. Where finds this Goddess not
Her easy prey ? She masters all the tribe
Of fish that swim the waters, she prevails
O'er all four-footed beasts that walk the earth.
Her wing directs the course of wandering birds,
Mighty o'er beasts, and men, and Gods above.
What God in wrestling throws she not thrice o'er ?
Yea, if 'twere lawful to speak all the truth,
She sways the breast of Zeus. All weaponless,
Without or spear or sword, the Kyprian queen
Cuts short the schemes of mortals or of Gods.

679

What house hath ever gained prosperity,
How swoln soe'er with pride, without the grace
Of woman's nobler nature.

680

But when bereavement falls upon her house,
A woman has the purpose of a man.

681

No small disease is poverty for those

FRAGMENTS

Who boast of wealth ; than poverty no foe
Is found more hostile.

682

O race of mortal men oppressed with care !
What nothings are we, like to shadows vain,
Cumbering the ground, and wandering to and fro !

683

None but the Gods may live untouched by ill.

684

O God, we mortals find no way to flee
From evils deeply-rooted, sent from Heaven.

685

Would one might live, and give the present hour
Its fill of pleasure, while the future creeps
For ever unforeseen.

686

The skilful gamester still should make the best
Of any throw, and not bemoan his luck.

687

Tis hope that feeds the larger half of men.

688

Ne'er can the wise grow old, in whom there dwells
A soul sustained with light of Heaven's own day :
Great gain to men is forethought such as theirs.

689

He who in midst of woes desireth life,
Is either coward or insensible.

690

A. Now he is dead, I yearn to die with him.

B. Why such hot haste ? Thou needs must meet thy fate.

FRAGMENTS

691

Truth evermore surpasseth words in might.

694

A woman's oaths I write upon the waves.

701

To drink against one's will
Is not less evil than unwilling thirst.

702

If thou should'st bring all wisdom of the wise
To one who thirsts, thou could'st not please him more
Than giving him to drink.

703

Most basely wilt thou die by doom of Heaven,
Who, being as thou art, dost still drain off
Thy pottle-deep potations.

705

This wanton insolence
Is never brought to self-control in youth,
But still among the young bursts out, and then
Tames down and withers.

707

I know that God is ever such as this,
Darkly disclosing counsels to the wise ;
But to the simple, speaking fewest words,
Plain teacher found.

709

Thou shalt find a God
Who knoweth not or charity or grace,
But loves strict justice, that and that alone.

FRAGMENTS

711

Whoso will enter in a monarch's house
Is but his bond-slave, though he come as free.

713

In many a turning of the wheel of God
My fate revolves and changes all its mood ;
E'en as the moon's face never keepeth still
For but two nights in one position fixed,
But from its hiding-place first comes as new,
With brightening face, and thenceforth waxeth full ;
And when it gains its noblest phase of all,
Wanes off again, and comes to nothingness.

714

Counsel of evil travelleth all too quick.

715

If any man beginneth all things well,
The chances are his ends agree thereto.

717

Words that are false bring forth no fruit at all.

718

Though one be poor, his fame may yet stand high.

Not one whit worse the poor whose heart is wise.

What profit is there from our many goods,

If care, with evil thoughts,

Is still the nurse of fair prosperity ?

719

Thrice happy they, who, having seen these rites,
Then pass to Hades : there to these alone
Is granted life, all others evil find.

FRAGMENTS

723

What may be taught I learn ; what may be found
That I still seek for ; what must come by prayer,
For that I asked the Gods.

724

Go forth, ye people strong of hand, to work,
Who with your balanced baskets of first-fruits
Worship the Working Goddess, child of Zeus,
Whose eyes are dread to look on.

725

And dost thou mourn the death of mortal man,
Not knowing if the future bringeth gain ?

727

Thou waxest wanton, like a high-fed colt ;
For maw and mouth are glutted with excess.

732

Searching out all things, thou in most men's acts
Wilt find but baseness.

739

Unlooked-for things must once for all begin.

741

Those who lose such friends lose them to their joy,
And they who have them for deliverance pray.

749

This is the gift of God, and what the Gods
Shall give, we men, my child, should never shun.

762

An old man's wrath is like ill-tempered scythe,
Sharp to begin, but quickly blunted off.

FRAGMENTS

763

The dice of Zeus have ever lucky throws.

772

Be pitiful, O Sun,

Whom the wise name as father of the Gods,
Author of all things.

779

Since we have rightly made our prayer to God,
Let us now go, O boys, to where the wise
Impart their knowledge of the Muses' arts.
Each day we need to take some forward step,
Till we gain power to study nobler things.
Evil a boy will learn without a guide,
With little labour, learning from himself;
But good, not even with his teacher near,
Dwells in his soul, but is full hardly gained :
Let us then, boys, be watchful, and work hard,
Lest we should seem with men untaught to rank
The children of a father far from home.

780

The gratitude of one whose memory fails
Is quickly gone.

RHYMED CHORAL ODES
AND
LYRICAL DIALOGUES

ŒDIPUS THE KING

151-215

STROPHE I

WHAT wert thou, O thou voice
Of Zeus, thou bad'st rejoice,
Floating to Thebes from Pytho gold-abounding ?
I tremble ; every sense
Thrills with the dread suspense ;
(O Delian Pæan, hear our cries resounding !)
My soul is filled with fears,
What thou wilt work on earth,
Or now or in the circling years ;—
Speak, child of golden Hope, thou Voice of heavenly birth !

ANTISTROPHE I

Athena, first of all,
Thee, child of Zeus, I call,
And Artemis thy sister with us dwelling,
Whom, on her glorious throne,
Our agora doth own,
And Phœbos in the archer's skill excelling ;
Come, O ye Guardians three,
If e'er in days of yore
Ye bade the tide of evil flee,
Drive off this fiery woe as once ye drove before.

STROPHE II

Yea come ; for lo ! I fail
To tell my woes' vast tale ;
For all my host in fear and sickness languish,

ŒDIPUS THE KING

And weapons fail each mind ;
For the earth's increase kind
Is gone, and women faint in childbirth's anguish :
Thou see'st men, one by one,
Like bird of fleetest wing,
Swifter than flashing ray of sun,
Pass to His gloomy shore who reigns of darkness King.

ANTISTROPHE II

Countless the spoil of death ;
Our city perisheth,
And on the tainted earth our infants lie ;
The tender heart is cold,
And wives and matrons old,
Now here, now there, by every altar cry.
And clear the Pæans gleam,
And chants of sorrow born ;
O golden child of Zeus supreme,
Put forth thy power to help, bright-eyed as is the morn !

STROPHE III

And Ares, mighty One,
Who weaponless comes on,
And fierce and hot with battle-cry assaileth,—
Bid him in flight to tread
By Amphitrite's bed,
Or Thrakia's homeless coast where wild wave wailleth.
If aught is spared by night,
It droops before the day ;
O Thou who wield'st the lightning's blazing might,
O Zeus our Father, dart thy thunder him to slay !

ANTISTROPHE III

And oh ! Lykeian king,
That from thy gold-wrought string
Thy arrows might go forth in strength excelling ;

ŒDIPUS THE KING

And all the flashing rays
That Artemis displays,
Who on the Lykian mountains hath her dwelling !
Thee, Bacchos, I invoke,
Whose name our land hath borne,
Come, wine-flushed, gold-crowned, Mænad-girt,
with smoke
Of blazing torch against that God, of Gods the scorn.

462-511

STROPHE I

Who was it that the rock of Delphos named,
In speech oracular,
That wrought with bloody hands his deeds dark-shamed ?
Well may he wander far,
With footstep swifter and more strong
Than wind-winged steed that flies along ;
For on him leaps, in Heaven's own panoply,
With fire and flash, the son of Zeus most High,
And with Him, dread and fell,
The dark Fates follow, irresistible.

ANTISTROPHE I

For 'twas but now from out the snowy height
Of old Parnassos shone
The Voice that bade us all to bring to light
The unknown guilty one ;
Each forest wild, each rocky shore,
Like untamed bull, he wanders o'er,
In dreary loneliness with dreary tread,
Seeking to shun dark oracles and dread,
From Delphi's central shrine ;
And yet they hover round with life and strength divine.

STROPHE II

Dread things, yea, dread the augur wise hath stirred :
I know not or to answer Aye, or No ;

ŒDIPUS THE KING

In vain, perplexed, I seek the fitting word,
And lost in fears nor past nor future know :
What cause of strife so fell
Between the son of Polybos hath come,
And those, the heirs of old Labdakid home,
I have found none to tell :
From none comes well-tryed word,
That I should war against the glory great
Of Œdipus my lord,
Or make myself the avenger of an unknown fate.

ANTISTROPHE II

Yet Zeus and King Apollo, they are wise,
And know the secret things that mortals do ;
But that a prophet sees with clearer eyes
Than these I see with, is no judgment true.
Though one in wisdom high
May wisdom of another far excel ;
Yet I, until I see it 'stablished well,
Will ne'er take up the cry :
One thing is clear, she came,
The wingèd maiden,—and men found him wise ;
Our city hailed his name,
And from my heart the charge of baseness ne'er shall
rise.

863-910

STROPHE I

Would 'twere my lot to lead
My life in holiest purity of speech,
In purity of deed,
Of deed and word whose Laws high-soaring reach
Through all the vast concave,
Heaven-born, Olympos their one only sire !
To these man never gave
The breath of life, nor shall they e'er expire

ŒDIPUS THE KING

In dim oblivion cold :
In these God shews as great and never waxeth old.

ANTISTROPHE I

The wantonness of pride
Begets the tyrant,—wanton pride, full-flushed
With thoughts vain, idle, wide,
That to the height of topmost fame hath rushed,
And then hath fallen low,
Into dark evil where it cannot take
One step from out that woe.
I cannot bid the Gods this order break
Of toil for noblest end ;
Yea, still I call on God as guardian and as friend.

STROPHE II

But if there be who walks too haughtily
In action or in speech,
Who the great might of Justice dares defy,
Whom nought can reverence teach,
Ill fate be his for that his ill-starred scorn,
Unless he choose to win
Henceforth the gain that is of Justice born,
And holds aloof from sin,
Nor lays rash hand on things inviolable.
Who now will strive to guard
His soul against the darts of passion fell ?
If such deeds gain reward,
What boots it yet again
In choral dance to chant my wonted strain ?

ANTISTROPHE II

No more will I at yonder spot divine,
Earth's centre, kneeling fall,
In Abæ's temple, or Olympia's shrine,
Unless, in sight of all,

ŒDIPUS THE KING

These things appear as tokens clear and true.
But oh, Thou Lord and King,
If unto Thee that name be rightly due,
Creation governing,
Let it not 'scape Thee, or thy deathless might !
For now the words of old
To Laios uttered, they despise and slight ;
Nor does Apollo hold
His place in men's esteem,
And things divine are counted as a dream.

1186-1223

STROPHE I

O race of mortal men,
I number you and deem
That ye, although ye live,
Are but an empty dream.
What man, yea, what, knows more
Of happiness and peace,
Than just the idle show,
And then the sure decrease ?
Thy face as pattern given,
O Œdipus, my king,
Thy doom, yea thine, I say,
I know of none I count as truly prospering.

ANTISTROPHE I

Thou, once with strange success,
As archer taking aim,
Did'st hit the mark in all,
Great riches and great fame :
And did'st, (O Zeus !) lay low
The maiden skilled in song,
The monster terrible,
With talons crook'd and long.

ŒDIPUS THE KING

Thou against death wast seen
Thy country's sure defence ;
And therefore thou art king ;
To thee the Lord of Thebes we all our homage bring.

STROPHE II

And who of all men is more wretched now ?
Who dwells with woe perpetually as thou,
In chance and change of life,
O Œdipus renowned, for whom was won
The same wide haven, sheltering sire and son ?
Ah how, O mother-wife,
Could that defiled bed, when he had come,
Receive him and be dumb ?

ANTISTROPHE II

Time, the all-seeing, finds thee out at last,
And passes sentence on the hateful past,
The wedlock none might wed,
Where son and spouse in strange confusion met.
Ah, son of Laios, would I could forget !
In one true word, thy succour gave me breath,
By thee I sleep in death.

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS.

668-718

STROPHE I

Yes, thou art come, O guest,
Where our dear land is brightest of the bright,
Land in its good steeds blest,
Our home, Colonos, gleaming fair and white,
The nightingale still haunteth all our woods
Green with the flush of spring,
And sweet melodious floods
Of softest song through grove and thicket ring ;
She dwelleth in the shade
Of glossy ivy, dark as purpling wine,
And the untrodden glade
Of trees that hang their myriad fruit divine,
Unscathed by blast of storm ;
Here Dionysos finds his dear-loved home,
Here, revel-flushed, his form
Is wont with those his fair nurse-nymphs to roam.

ANTISTROPHE I

Here, as Heaven drops its dew,
Narcissus grows with fair bells clustered o'er,
Wreath to the Dread Ones due,
The Mighty Goddesses whom we adore ;
And here is seen the crocus, golden-eyed ;
The sleepless streams ne'er fail ;
Still wandering on they glide,
And clear Kephisos waters all the vale ;
Daily each night and morn
It winds through all the wide and fair champaign,

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

And pours its flood new-born
From the clear freshets of the fallen rain ;
The Muses scorn it not,
But here, rejoicing, their high feast-days hold,
And here, in this blest spot,
Dwells Aphrodite in her car of gold.

STROPHE II

And here hath grown long while
A marvel and a wonder such as ne'er
I heard of elsewhere,—
Nor in great Asia's land nor Dorian Isle
That Pelops owned as his ;
Full great this marvel is,—
A plant unfailing, native to the place,
Terror to every sword
Of fierce invading horde,
The grey-green Olive, rearing numerous race,
Which none or young or old
Shall smite in pride o'erbold ;
For still the orb of Zeus that all things sees
Looks on it from on high,
Zeus, the great guardian of our olive-trees,
And she, Athena, with grey gleaming eye.

ANTISTROPHE II

And yet another praise,
The chiefest boast of this our mother state,
My tongue must now relate,
The gift of that great God who ocean sways ;—
Of this our native ground
The greatest glory found,
Its goodly steeds and goodly colts I sing,
And, goodly too, its sea ;
O Son of Cronos, Thee
We own, Thou great Poseidon, Lord and King,

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

For thou hast made it ours
To boast these wondrous dowers,
First in our city did'st first on horses fleet
Place the subduing bit ;
And through the sea the oars well-handled flit,
Following the Nereids with their hundred feet !

1044-1095

STROPHE I

Fain would I be where meet,
In brazen-throated war,
The rush of foes who wheel in onset fleet,
Or by the Pythian shore,
Or where the waving torches gleam afar,
Where the Dread Powers watch o'er
Their mystic rites for men that mortal are,
E'en they whose golden key
Hath touched the tongue of priests, Eumolpidæ :
There, there, I deem, our Theseus leads the fight,
And those two sisters, dauntless, undismayed,
Will meet, with eager clamour of delight
That nothing leaves unsaid,
Where through these lands they tread.

ANTISTROPHE I

Or do they now, perchance,
On to the western slope
Of old Œtis' snowy crest advance,
Hastening on swiftest steed,
Or in swift chariots each with other cope ?
Now will be spoil indeed :
Dread is their might who form our country's hope,
And dread the strength of those
Whom Theseus leads to triumph o'er their foes.
Each bit is glittering, all the squadrons speed ;
Shaking their reins, they urge their horses on,
E'en they who serve Athena on her steed,

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Or Rhea's ocean Son,
Who makes the earth his throne.

STROPHE II

Act they, or linger still ?
Ah, how my soul forecasts the coming fate,
That he, against his will,
Will yield the maid whose daring has been great,
Who hath borne greatest ill
From hands of her own kin ; but, soon or late,
Zeus works to-day great things:
I prophesy of glorious victories.
Ah ! would that I on wings,
Swift as a dove on airy cloud that flies,
Might glad my longing eye
With sight of that much yearned-for victory !

ANTISTROPHE II

O Zeus ! that reign'st on high,
All-seeing, grant the rulers of our land,
In strength of victory,
With good success in ambush there to stand ;
And Thou, his child revered,
Athena Pallas ; Thou, the huntsman-God,
Apollo, loved and feared.
And she, thy sister, who the woods hath trod
Following the dappled deer
Swift-footed ; lo ! on each of you I call,—
Come, bringing succour near
To this our land, and to its people all.

1211-1248

STROPHE

One whose desire is strong
For length of days,

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Who slights the middle path,
True path of praise ;
He in my eyes shall seem
Mere dreamer vain ;
For oftentimes length of days
Brings nought but pain ;
And joys—thou can'st not now
Their dwelling guess,
When once a man gives way
To hope's excess ;
At last the helper comes
That comes to all,
When Hades' doom appears
And dark shades fall ;
Lyreless and songless then,
No wedding guest,
Death comes to work the end,
Death, last and best.

ANTISTROPHE

Never to be at all,
Excels all fame ;
Quickly, next best, to pass
From whence we came.
When youth hath passed away,
With follies vain,
Who then is free from cares ?
Where is not pain ?
Murders and strifes and wars,
Envy and hate ;
Then, evil worst of all,
The old man's fate :
Powerless and wayward then,
No friend to cheer,—

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

All ills on ills are met,
All dwelling there.

EPODE

Thus this poor sufferer lives,
Not I alone ;
As on far northern coast
Wild waters moan,
So without rest or hope,
Woes round him swarm,
Dread as the waves that rage,
Dark as the storm,—
Some from the far, far west
Where sunsets glow ;
Some where through eastern skies
Dawn's bright rays flow ;
These where the burning south
Feels the hot light,
Those where Rhipæan hills
Rise in dark night.

1447-1456

STROPHE

New sorrows throng on me,
From new source come,
New evils from this blind man's misery,
This stranger to our home ;
Unless it be that Destiny has brought
What shall at last prevail ;
For lo ! I dare not say that any thought
Of the high Gods shall fail.
Time ever sees these things, beholds them all,
Bringing full round his wheel,
Upraising in a day the things that fall :—
O Zeus ! that thunder-peal !

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

1463-1471

ANTISTROPHE

Lo ! the loud thunder sweeps,
Heaven-sent and dread ;
And panic terror through each white hair creeps
That crowns my aged head ;
I shudder in my soul, for yet again
The flashing lightning gleams.
What shall I say ? What issue will it gain ?
Fear fills my waking dreams ;
For not in vain do all these portents rise,
Nor void of end foreknown ;
O flashing fire that blazest through the skies !
O Zeus, the Almighty One !

1477-1485

STROPHE

Ah me ! ah me ! again
Resounds the crash that pierces in its might :
Be pitiful, be pitiful, O God !
If aught thou bringest black and dark as night,
To this our mother earth :
Yea, may I still find favour in thy sight
Nor gain boon little worth
Of seeing one on whom all curses fall !
King Zeus, on thee I call !

ANTISTROPHE

My son, come on, come on,
E'en though thou dost thy sacred station keep
There on the valley's edge,
For great Poseidon, Lord of Ocean deep,
For now the stranger-guest
His thanks on thee and on thy state would heap,
And bless thee, being blest.

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS

Come therefore quickly ; come, O Prince and King,
And timely counsel bring.

1555-1578

STROPHE

If right it be with prayers and litanies
To worship Her who reigns,
Goddess in darkness clad,
Or Thee, O King of those
Who dwell 'neath sunless skies,
Aidoneus, O Aidoneus, I implore !
Grant that the stranger tread the darkling plains,
The dwellings of the dead and Stygian shore,
With no long agony,
No voice of wailing cry ;
For so, though many woes unmerited
Come on him, God, the Just, shall yet lift up his head.

ANTISTROPHE

Ye Goddesses who dwell in darkest gloom,
And thou, strange form and dread,
Monster untamed and wild,
Who crouchest, so they say,
By well-worn gates of doom,
And barkest from thy cavern, warder strong,
In Hades (so the rumours ever spread ;)
Grant to our friend clear space to pass along ;
(O Thou who owe'st to Earth
And Tartaros thy birth !)
There where he nears the chambers drear and dread ;
Thee I implore, who still dost sleep as sleep the dead.

ANTIGONE

100-161

STROPHE I

Ray of the golden sun,
 Fairest of all
That e'er in Thebes have lit
 Her seven gates tall,
Then did'st thou shine on us,
 In golden gleams ;
As day's bright eye did'st come,
 O'er Dirké's streams,
Driving the warrior strong,
 With snow-white shield
Who had from Argos come,
 Armed for the field :
Him Thou did'st put to flight,
 With headlong speed,
Yea, hurl in shameful rout,
 Spurring his steed.

Him Polyneikes, urged by quarrel dread,
 Brought to our land a foe ;
He with shrill scream, as eagle over-head,
 Hovered with wing of snow,
With many armed warriors, shield on breast,
 And helmet's waving crest.

ANTISTROPHE I

And so he came and stood,
 In fierce, hot hate,
With spears that slaughter craved,
 Round each tall gate.

ANTIGONE

He went, his jaws unfilled
With blood of ours,
Ere pine-fed blaze had seized
Our crown of towers.
So great the battle-din
Around his rear,—
The crash, that Ares loves,
Of shield and spear :
Hard conflict that and stiff
For well-matched foe,
The dragon fierce who fought
And laid him low.

For Zeus the lofty speech of boastful pride
Hateth exceedingly ;
And sees them as they flow in torrent wide,
Proud of gold panoply,—
With fire swift-flung he hurls from rampart high
One who shouts " Victory ! "

STROPHE II

So smitten down he fell
Straight to the echoing earth,
He who, with torch of fire,
And mad with frenzied mirth,
Swooped on our hearth and home
With blasts of bitter hate.

So fared they ; Ares wroth
To each brought different fate,
And so appeared, in hour of greatest need,
Our chariot's worthiest steed.

For seven great captains at our seven gates stood,
Equals with equals matched, and left their arms
Tribute to Zeus on high,—
All but the brothers, hateful in their mood,
Who, from one father and one mother born,
Each claiming victory,

ANTIGONE

Wielded their spears in murderous, deadliest hate,
And shared one common fate.

ANTISTROPHE II

But now since Victory comes,
Mighty and glorious named,
Giving great cause of joy
To Thebes for chariots famed ;
Of these our conflicts past
Learn ye forgetfulness,
And with our night-long dance
Around each temple press ;
And Bacchos, making Thebes to ring again,
Let Him begin the strain.

But now the prince and sovereign of our land,
Creon, Menœkeus' son, with counsels new,
Following new turns of fate,
Comes, having matters of great weight in hand ;
For he has called us all to conference,
The elders of his state,
And by one common summons for us sent,
For this high parliament.

332-375

STROPHE I

Many the things that strange and wondrous are,
None stranger and more wonderful than man ;
He dares to wander far,
With stormy blast across the hoary sea,
Where nought his eye can scan
But waves still surging round unceasingly ;
And Earth, of all the Gods,
Mightiest, unwearied, indestructible,
He weareth year by year, and breaks her clods,
While the keen plough-share marks its furrows well,
Still turning to and fro ;

ANTIGONE

And still he bids his steeds
Through daily taskwork go.

ANTISTROPHE I

And lo ! with snare and net he captives makes
Of all the swift-winged tribes that flit through air ;
Wild, untamed beasts he takes ;
And many a sea-born dweller of the deep
He with devices rare
Snares in his mesh,—man, wonderful in skill ;
And all brute things that dwell
In forest dark, or roam upon the hill,
He by his craft makes subject to his need,
And brings upon the neck of rough-maned steed
The yoke that makes him bend,
And binds the mountain bull
Resisting to the end.

STROPHE II

And speech, and subtle thought,
Swift as the wind,
And temper duly wrought
To statesman's mind,—
These he hath learnt, and how to flee the power
Of cold that none may bear,
And all the tempest darts of arrowy shower
'That hurtle through the air :
Armed at all points, unarmed he nought shall meet
That coming time reveals ;
Only from Hades finds he no retreat,
'Though many a sore disease that hopeless seemed he
heals.

ANTISTROPHE II

And lo ! with all this skill,
Beyond hope's dream,
He now to good inclines
And now to ill ;

ANTIGONE

Now holding fast his country's ancient laws,
And in the state's esteem
Most honoured ; but dishonoured, should he cause
The thing as evil known
To rule his heart in wantonness of pride ;
Ne'er may he dwell with me,
Nor share my counsels, prompting at my side,
Who evil deeds like this still works perpetually !

582-630

STROPHE I

Ah ! happy are the souls that know not ill ;
For they whose house is struck by wrath divine,
Find that no sorrow faileth, creeping still
Through long descent of old ancestral line ;
So is it as a wave
Of ocean's billowing surge,
(Where Thrakian storm-winds rave,
And floods of darkness from the depths emerge,)
Rolls the black sand from out the lowest deep,
And shores re-echoing wail, as rough blasts o'er them sweep.

ANTISTROPHE I

Woes upon woes fast falling on the race
Of Labdacos that faileth still I see,
Nor can one age for that which comes win grace,
But still some God hurls all to misery :
All power to heal is fled ;
For her, the one faint light,
That o'er the last root spread,
And in the house of *Ædipus* was bright,
Now doth the blood-stained scythe of Gods below
Cut down, man's frenzied word and dread *Erinnys*' woe.

STROPHE II

What pride of man, O Zeus, in check can hold
Thy power divine,

ANTIGONE

Which nor sleep seizeth that makes all things old,
Nor the long months of God in endless line ?
 Thou grow'st not old with time,
 But ruling in thy might,
For ever dwellest in thy home sublime,
Olympos, glittering in its sheen of light :
 And through the years' long tale,
 The far time or the near,
As through the past, this law shall still prevail :—
Nought comes to life of man without or woe or fear.

ANTISTROPHE II

For unto many men come hopes that rove,
 Bringing vain joy,
And unto many cheats of blinded love ;
Subtly it creeps upon the unconscious boy,
 Until his feet wax bold
 To tempt the blazing fire.
For wisely was it said by one of old,
True speech, far-famed, for all men to admire,
 That evil seems as good
 To him whom God would slay,
Through doom of evil passion in the blood ;
And he without that doom scarce passeth e'en a day.

781-881

STROPHE I

O Erôs, irresistible in fight,
 Thou rushest on thy prey,
Or on fair maiden's blushing cheeks
 All night dost lurking stay ;
Over the sea thou roamest evermore,
Or through the huts of shepherds rough and poor :
 None of the deathless Ones can flee,
 Nor mortal men escape from thee ;
And mad is he who comes beneath thy sway.

ANTIGONE

ANTISTROPHE I

Minds of the righteous, true and faithful found
Thou turn'st aside to ill,
And now this strife of nearest kin
Thou stirrest at thy will.
Mighty is Love in glance of beauteous bride,
Enthroned it sits with great laws at its side;
And One, in wondrous might,
Makes merry at the sight,
The Goddess Aphrodite, conquering still.
So even I am borne along
Beyond the bounds that law uprears,
And, seeing this, am no more strong
To stay the fountain of my tears;
For lo! Antigone doth tread
The path to that wide couch where slumber all the dead.

Antigone

STROPHE II

Yes, O my friends and countrymen, ye see
How I my last path tread,
And look on the last ray of brilliancy
By yonder bright sun shed,—
This once, but never more; for Hades vast,
Drear home of all the dead,
Leads me, in life, where Acheron flows fast,
Sharing no marriage bed:
No marriage hymn was mine in all the past,
But Acheron I wed.

Chorus

And dost thou not depart,
Glorious, with highest praise,
To where the dead are gathered in the gloom,
Not smitten by the wasting plague's fell dart,
Nor slain, as sharp sword slays?

ANTIGONE

But free and living still,
Thou, of thine own free will,
Descendest to the darkness of the tomb.

Antigone

ANTISTROPHE II

I heard of one, the child of Tantalos,
The Phrygian, crushed with woes,
And there, hard by the crag of Sipylos,
As creeping ivy grows,
So crept the shoots of rock o'er life and breath ;
And, as the rumour goes,
The showers ne'er leave her, wasting in her death,
Nor yet the drifting snows ;
From weeping brows they drip on rocks beneath ;
Thus God my life o'erthrows.

Chorus

And yet a Goddess she, of birth divine,
And we frail mortals, and of mortal race ;
And for weak woman it is highest grace
That fate the Gods have suffered should be thine.

Antigone

STROPHE III

Alas ! ye mock at me ;
Why thus laugh on ?
As yet I still live here,
Not wholly gone.
O fellow citizens
Of city treasure-stored !
O streams of Dirke's brook !
O grove of Thebes adored,
Where stand the chariots fair !—
I bid you witness give,
How, by my friends unwept,
I pass while yet I live,

ANTIGONE

To yonder heaped-up mound of new-made tomb:

Ah, miserable me !

Nor dwelling among men, nor with the dead,

Bearing this new, drear doom,

Disowned by those who live, and those whose life hath
fled.

Chorus

Thou hast gone far in boldness, yea, too far,

And now against the throne of Right on high,

My child, thou stumblest in thy waywardness ;

Thou fillest up thy father's misery.

Antigone

ANTISTROPHE III

Ah ! there thou touchest on

My bitterest care,

The thrice-told tale of woe

My sire did bear,

The fate of all who take

From Labdacos their name ;

Woes of my mother's bed !

Embrace of foulest shame,

Mother's and son's, whence I

(O misery !) was born ;

Whom now I go to meet,

Unwed, accursed, forlorn.

Ah, brother ! thou, in evil wedlock wed,

Hast, in that death of thine,

Made me, who still survived, as numbered with the dead.

Chorus

Holy it may be, holy awe to shew,

But power with him with whom due power doth rest

Admits not of defiance without sin ;

And thou from self-willed pride yet sufferest.

ANTIGONE

Antigone

Friendless, unwept, unwed,
I wend in sorrow my appointed way ;
No more may I behold this sacred ray
By yon bright glory shed,
And yet no single friend
Utters a wail for my unwept-for end.

937-987

Antigone

City of Thebes, my fathers' ancient home,
Ye Gods of days of old,
I linger not. They drag me to my doom ;
Princes of Thebes, behold ;
See ye what I, the last of kingly race,
And at whose hands I suffer sore disgrace,
Because all holy ties I still as holy hold.

Chorus

STROPHE I

So once of old the form of Danae bore
The loss of heavenly light,
In palace strong with brazen fastenings bright,
And, in her tomb-like chamber evermore,
Did long a prisoner dwell ;
Yet she, my child, my child, was high in birth,
And golden shower, that flowed from Zeus to earth,
She cherished right well :
Ah, strange and dread the power of Destiny,
Which neither proud and full prosperity,
Nor Ares in his power,
Nor dark, sea-beaten ships, nor tower,
Are able to defy.

ANTIGONE

ANTISTROPHE I

So too the son of Dryas once was bound,
 King of Edonian race;
Rough-tempered, he, for words of foul disgrace,
At Dionysos' hands stern sentence found,
 In rocky cave confined :
And so there faileth, drop by drop, the life
Of one whose soul was racked by maddening strife ;
 And then he called to mind
That he had touched the God with ribald tongue ;
For he essayed to check the Mænads' throng,
 And quench the sacred fire,
And stirred to jealousy the choir
 Of Muses loving song.

STROPHE II

Hard by the gloomy rocks where two seas meet
 The shores of Bosporos rise,
And Salmydessos, the wild Thrakians' seat,
Where Ares saw upon the bleeding eyes
A wound accursèd, made in hellish mood
 Of step-dame stern and fierce,—
Eyes that were torn by hands deep dyed in blood,
And points of spindles, quick and sharp to pierce.

ANTISTROPHE II

And they, poor wretches, wail their wretched fate,
 Birth stained with foul disgrace ;
They wail their mother's lot, of lineage great,
Descended from the old Erectheid race ;
And she in yon far distant caverns vast,
 Daughter of Boreas, grew,
On lofty crag, amid the stormy blast ;
And yet on her the Fates their dread spell threw.

ANTIGONE

1115-1152

STROPHE I

O Thou of many a name,
Joy of Cadmeian bride,
Child of great Zeus loud-thundering from the sky !
Thou rulest o'er Italia great in fame,
And dwellest where the havens open wide
Of Deo, whom Eleusis throneth high.
O Bacchos, who in Thebes delightest most,
Fair mother-city of the Bacchic throng,
Or where Ismenos' stream flows full and strong,
Or by the brood that sprang from dragon's armed host.

ANTISTROPHE I

Thee the bright flame saw there,
O'er rock of double crest,
Where nymphs of Corycos in revel roam,
And bright Castalia's fountain floweth fair ;
And Thee, the banks of Nysa ivy-drest,
And the green shore, of many a vine the home,
Lead forth with joy, a welcome visitant,
In all the open spaces of the town,
While words scarce mortal come our joy to crown,
And make our Thebes resound with rapture jubilant.

STROPHE II

Yes, this of all that are,
Cities of ancient note,
Thou honourest most by far,
Thou, and thy mother whom the thunder smote ;
And now since all the land
By sharp, sore pestilence is smitten low,
Come Thou with feet still cleansing as they go,
Or o'er Parnassian height,
Or where the waters bright
Make their perpetual moan to shores on either hand.

ANTIGONE

ANTISTROPHE II

O Thou that lead'st the choir
Of stars in yonder skies
That breathe with living fire,
The Lord and ruler of the night's loud cries ;
Child of great Zeus adored !
Appear, O King ! with all thy Thyiad train,
Who, all night long, in dance that fires the brain,
Raise shouts of ecstasy,
With fierce and frenzied cry,
Still honouring thee, Iacchos, King and Lord.

ELECTRA

86-250

Electra

O HOLY light of morn !
O air that dost the whole earth compass round
Oft have ye heard my cries of grief forlorn,
 And oft the echoing sound
 Of blows the breast that smite,
 When darkness yields to light ;
And for my nightly vigils they know well,
 Those loathèd couches of my hated home,
How I upon my father's sorrows dwell ;
 To whom in no strange land did Ares come
 Breathing out slaughter dread ;
But she, my mother, and her paramour,
 Ægisthos, smote him dead
With axe of murderous power ;
 As men who timber hew
Cut down a lofty oak, so him they slew ;
 And from none else but me
 Comes touch of sympathy,
 Though thou wast doomed to die,
My father, with such shame and foulest ignominy.

And, lo ! I will not fail
To weep and mourn with wailings and with sighs,
While yet I see the bright stars in the skies,
 Or watch the daylight glad,—
No, no, I will not fail,
Like sorrowing nightingale,

ELECTRA

Before the gate to pour my sorrows free,
 My woe and sorrow at my father's doom.
O house of Hades and Persephone,
 O Hermes, guide of dwellers in the gloom,
 Thou, awful Curse, and ye,
Erinnyes, daughters of the Gods, most dread,
 Whose eyes for ever see
Men foully slain, and those whose marriage bed
 The lust of evil guile
 Doth stealthily defile,
Come, come, avengers of my father's fate !
 Come, send my brother back !
 For I the courage lack,
Alone to bear the burden of this evil weight.

Chorus

STROPHE I

O child, Electra, child
Of mother doomed to all extremest ill,
 Why thus in wailing wild
Dost thou unceasing pour thy sorrows still
 For him who, long ago,
Caught in thy mother's base and godless cheat,
 Fell by the fatal blow,
Our chieftain, Agamemnon ? Yea, may he
 Who planned this vile deceit
 (If so to speak is meet)
Perish most wretchedly !

Electra

O daughters of the brave and true of heart,
 Ye come to comfort me in all my woe ;
I know your love, yea, know its every part ;
 And yet I have no wish to stop the flow

ELECTRA

Of tears and wailings for my ill-starred sire ;

But, O my friends, who meet,
With true affection, all my heart's desire,
Suffer me thus, I pray,
To pine and waste away.

Chorus

ANTISTROPHE I

And yet thou can'st not raise
Thy father, nor with wailing nor with prayer,
From Hades' darkling ways,
And gloomy lake where all that die repair ;
But thou, thus grieving still,
Dost pass, brought low, from evil one might bear
To that worst form of ill,
In which for deepest woe is no relief.
Ah me ! why striv'st thou so
For such increase of woe,
Still adding to my grief ?

Electra

Ah, weak as infant he who can forget
His parents that have perished wretchedly ;
Far more she pleaseth me that mourneth yet,
And " Itys, Itys," wails unceasingly ;
The bird heart-broken, messenger of Heaven.
Ah, Niobe, most sad !
To thee, I deem, high fate divine was given,
For thou in cavern grot,
Still weeping, ceasest not.

Chorus

STROPHE II

Ah, not for thee alone
Of mortal race hath come the taste of woes.
What cause hast thou above those twain to moan,
In whom the self-same blood of kindred flows,

ELECTRA

Iphianassa and Chrysothemis ?
And one in youth obscure and sad doth live,
Yet blest, at least, in this,
That unto him Mykenæ famed shall give
Its welcome as the son of noble sire,
Beneath the care of Zeus' almighty hand,
Returning once again, Orestes, to our land.

Electra

Yes, he it is for whom I waste away,
Wailing for him, in vain, unweariedly ;
And in my sorrow know no bridal day,
But weep sad tears from eyelids never dry,
Bearing my endless weight
Of dark and dreary fate :
And he remembers not
All that I did for him, and all he knew.
What message comes, yea, what,
That is not cheated of fulfilment true ?
He yearneth still for home ;
Yet yearning will not come.

Chorus

ANTISTROPHE II

Take heart, my child, take heart ;
Still mighty in the heavens Zeus doth reign,
Who sees the whole world, rules its every part :
To Him do thou commit thy bitter pain,
Nor be thou over-vexèd, nor forget
Those whom thou hatest sorely evermore ;
Time is a kind God yet ;
For neither he who dwells on Crisa's shore,
Where feed the oxen, Agamemnon's son,
Unheeding, there lives on ;
Nor yet the God who reigns
By Acheron's waters o'er his dark and drear domains.

ELECTRA

Electra

Nay, but the larger half of life is gone,
And all hope fails, and I no more can bear ;
No parents left, I waste my days alone,
And no true husband guardeth me from fear ;
Like one of alien race,
I, in my sore disgrace,
My father's chambers tend,
In this unsightly and unseemly dress,
And still as slave attend,
And wait on tables in my sore distress,
Tables that empty stand,
No friends on either hand.

Chorus

STROPHE III

Sad was thy father's cry,
When home he came, and sad when, as he lay,
The stern, keen blow came nigh
Of brazen hatchet sharp to smite and slay ;
Guile was it that devised the murderous crime,
And lust that slew him there,
Strangely strange form begetting of old time ;
Whether a God it were,
Or one of mortal race,
Who wrought these deeds of darkness and disgrace.

Electra

O day of all the days that ever came,
Most hateful unto me !
O night ! O woes of banquets none may name,
Which he, my sire, did see !
Foul death which their hands wrought,
The two that took by basest treachery
Him who my life's joy brought,
And so destroyed, destroyed me utterly.

ELECTRA

May He who dwells in might,
On yon Olympian height,
Give them to grieve with guilt-avenging groan,
And ne'er may they whose souls such deeds have known
Share in good fortune bright !

Chorus

ANTISTROPHE III

Take heed, and speak no more ;
Hast thou no thought from what high, prosperous state
Thou now art passing o'er,
Into what sorrow lorn and desolate ?
For thou hast gained a burden infinite
Of woe and wretchedness,
Still cherishing thy wrath in sore despite,
Fierce war and bitterness ;
And yet it were ill done
To come in conflict with a mighty one.

Electra

By sufferings dire, most dire, I was constrained :
I know it, wrath blinds not ;
And yet I will not hide, though direly pained,
The misery of my lot,
Not while in life I dwell.
Ah me ! from whom, my friends, companions dear,
From whom that thinketh well,
Shall I a word in season hope to hear ?
O ye, who fain would cheer,
Leave me, oh, leave me here,
For these my woes as endless shall be known ;
Nor will I cease to make my wailing moan,
And weep full many a tear.

Chorus

And yet of mere good will,
As mother fond and true,

ELECTRA

I bid thee this vain toil no more pursue,
Still breeding ill on ill.

Electra

Nay ; but what bounds are set to baseness here ?
Come, tell me this, I pray,
How can it e'er be right
Those who are dead to slight ?
Where did that law appear ?
May I ne'er walk in honour in their way,
Nor if aught good be mine,
Dwell with it happily,
Should I the wings confine
That rise with bitter cry,
And bid them cease to pay
Due reverence to my father past away !
If he who dies be but as dust and nought,
And poor and helpless lie,
And these no vengeance meet for what they wrought,
Then truly awe will die,
And all men lose their natural piety.

472-515

Chorus

STROPHE

Unless I be a brainstruck, erring seer,
Wanting in wisdom true,
Right doth her course pursue,
With dim foreshadowing :
She in her hands doth righteous victory bring,
And will ere long appear.
Yes, courage comes to me,
Hearing but now the tidings that they bring,
These visions breathing forth sweet hope and glee,
For never shall thy father, Lord and King

ELECTRA

Of all the Hellenes' race,
Forget the dire disgrace,
Nor that sharp brazen axe of yon far time,
Which slew him with all shame of foulest crime.

ANTISTROPHE

And so with many a foot and many a hand,
Lurking in ambush dread,
Shall come with brazen tread,
Erinnys terrible ;
For lo ! the clasp of blood-stained marriage-bed
Came in foul wedlock's band
On those who might not wed ;
And now, in face of these things, I must deem
That those who did or shared the deed of guilt
Shall have good reason to dislike their dream :
Yea, oracles are vain,
In dreams or prophet's strain,
Unless this shadowy phantom of the night
Shall reach its goal, victorious in the right.

EPODE

O chariot-race of old,
Full of great woe untold,
From Pelops' hand ;
How did'st thou come, yon time,
Dark with the guilt of crime,
To this our land !
For since the ocean wave
Gave Myrtilos a grave,
Out of the golden car
Hurled headlong forth afar,
With shame and foul despite,
No shame hath failed to light
On this our dwelling-place,
Bringing most foul disgrace.

ELECTRA

1058-1096

STROPHE I

Why, when we see on high
The birds whose wisdom is of noblest worth,
Still caring to supply
The wants of those from whom they had their birth,
Who fed their nestling youth,
Why do not we like boon with like requite ?
Nay, by the lightning bright
Of Zeus, and heavenly strength of Law and Truth,
Not long shall we live on unpunished.
O Fame ! for us poor mortals wont to bear
Thy tidings to the region of the dead,
Lift up thy wailing drear,
And to the Atreidæ, as they sleep below,
Report the shame, the discord, and the woe.

ANTISTROPHE I

Tell them those ills of old, yea, tell again,
And add that now the hot and bitter strife
Of these their children twain
Yields to no charm of fellowship in life.
Electra, now forlorn,
Deserted sails upon a stormy sea,
And in her misery,
Her father's fortune ceaseth not to mourn,
Like nightingale that waileth evermore ;
She little recks if death be in the way,
And stands prepared to sleep and wake no more,
If only she those two Erinnyes slay :
Who of all souls that are, with her can vie
For fair repute of filial loyalty ?

STROPHE II

No, none of all that boast a noble fame
Would wish his fair repute to stain and spot,

ELECTRA

By living basely, stript of honoured name ;
And thou, my child, did'st choose thy dreary lot,
Thine evil lot, bewept with many a tear,
Arming against the thing that right defies ;
And these two glories in one word dost bear
Known as true daughter, excellent and wise.

ANTISTROPHE II

Ah, may'st thou live and be as much above
Thy foes in might and wealth as now below
Thou dwellest ruled by those thou can'st not love !
For I have seen thee on thy sad path go—
No pleasant pathway that—but gaining still
The meed of praise for all the holiest laws,
Which highest place in heavenly order fill,
Py this thy reverence winning God's applause.

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

94-140

STROPHE I

O THOU, to whom the star-bespangled Night,
 Slain and despoiled, gives birth,
And lulls again to rest, O Sun-God bright,
 Thee, Helios, I implore,
 Tell me on what far shore
Alcmena's son is dwelling on the earth,
 (O Thou, whose glory gleaming
 In blaze of light is streaming !)
Or by the ocean-valley's deep descent,
Or taking rest in either continent,
 Tell Thou, with whom there dwells
A power to see which all our sight excels.

ANTISTROPHE I

For, lo ! I hear that she with anxious thought,
 Our Deianeira, sighs,
The bride of old in fierce, hot conflict sought ;
 And like some lonely bird,
 Whose wailing cry is heard,
Can never close in slumber tearless eyes,
 But still is forced to cherish
 Dread fear lest he should perish ;
And so in marriage couch, of spouse bereft,
Wears out her life, to lonely darkness left,
 And ever fears a fate
Full fraught with evil, dreary, desolate.

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

STROPHE II

145
For even as one sees
Or South or North wind sweep resistless on,
And toss the vexèd seas,
The wild waves rushing, surging one by one,
So him of Cadmos born,
By many a great grief worn,
A Cretan sea of troubles vexeth still ;
And yet some great God's might
Keeps him from Death's dark night,
And ever guards from each extremest ill.

ANTISTROPHE II

I, therefore, blaming this,
Will come with words, though pleasant, thwarting thee :
I say thou dost amiss
To let thy better hope all wasted be.
The King who all doth hold,
Great son of Cronos old,
Hath given to no man fortune free from woe ;
But still the wheeling sphere,
Where turns the northern Bear,
Brings joy and sorrow circling as they go.

EPODE

It stayeth not on earth,
Nor star-bespangled Night, nor gloomy Fate,
Nor riches, nor high birth ;
But still it comes and goes,
Lighting on these or those,
Or joy abounding, or the low estate.
And this I say that thou,
My queen, should'st bear in mind :
For who hath seen in all the past till now
Zeus to his children known as careless or unkind ?

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

205-224

Let the loud shout arise,
With clear, re-echoing cries,
From maidens bright and fair with youth's fresh
glow;
And let the cry of men,
Again and yet again,
Hail great Apollo, bearer of the bow:
Pæans on pæans raise,
Ye maidens, in his praise,
And on his sister call, Ortygian Artemis,
The huntress of the deer,
With torches flashing clear,
And all the Nymphs whose dwelling near us is.
I quiver through each vein,
And dare not slight thy strain,
O flute, thou sovereign master of my soul;
Lo ! the twined ivy-wreath
Stirs me with passionate breath,
And bids me leap in Bacchic strife beneath its strong
control.

498-532

STROPHE

Great is the power the Kyprian Goddess wields :
I speak not of the things
That touch on Heaven's high kings,
I will not tell how e'en the son of Cronos yields
To wiles that mock and cheat ;
Nor how the dark retreat
Of Hades she invades and captive makes
Poseidaôn, whose touch the great earth shakes.
But who were they who came,
As combatants of fame,

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

To woo the hand of that fair virgin bride ?
 Who strove with many a blow
 And wrestlings, bending low,
And cloud of dust all round that did the conflict hide ?

ANTISTROPHE

One was a mighty river, dread to see,
 A bull with four limbs long,
 And lofty horns and strong,
The Acheloös stream from far Cœniadæ ;
 And one from Thebes did go,
 Shaking his well-strung bow,
With spear and club, the son of Zeus most high.
And they in hot and deadly rivalry,
 Seeking for marriage-bed,
 Came to the combat dread ;
And she, the Kyprian Goddess, fair to see,
 There, in the midst, alone
 Stood by, the Mighty One,
Wielding the umpire's rod in her supremacy.

EPODE

 Clash of hands was there,
 And din of clanging bow,
 And horns that smote the air,
And wrestlings, limbs with limbs, and many a sturdy blow,
And many a cry of pain on either side ;
And she, the fair-faced, tender, delicate,
Upon the bank that gave good prospect sate,
Waiting for one to claim her as his bride.
 (So, as her mother told,
 I tell that tale of old ;)
And there the sad, pale face of sorrowing maid,
 Thus wooed and won with strife,
 Awaits her lot as wife,
Like lonely heifer wandering far in wildest glade.

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

633-662

STROPHE I

O ye whose dwelling lies
By the warm springs that to the harbour flow,
Or where the tall rocks rise
And cliffs of Cæta ; ye who wont to go
Hard by the Melian lake,
And coasts where roams the golden-arrowed queen,
Where Hellenes counsel take,
And there at Pylæ famed their agora convene,

ANTISTROPHE I

Quickly to you the flute
Shall raise in music sweet no tuneless strain,
But one that well may suit
The answering lyre from out the Muses' train :
For now Alcmena's son,
Who Zeus his father calls, returneth home ;
With spoils that he hath won,
High prize of valour, now will he exulting come :

STROPHE II

E'en he of whom we thought
Twelve long months, knowing nought,
As of an exile far upon the sea ;
While, weeping for her lord,
Her tears the poor wife poured,
And her sad heart grew faint with misery ;
But now to fury wrought,
Great Ares hath the end of all her dark days brought.

ANTISTROPHE II

Oh, may he come, yes, come !
Ne'er, till he reach his home,

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

May his swift ship know hazards nor delays !
 Leaving the sea-washed shrine,
 Where he, in rite divine,
Is said to offer sacrifice and praise,
 So may he come, all calm,
Soothed at the Kentaur's hest by that anointing balm !

821-861

STROPHE I

See, O ye maidens, how the sacred word
Of that far-seeing Providence of Heaven
 Hath sped, through which we heard
That, when the twelfth full harvest-tide should come,
Its months completed, there should then be given
To the true son of Zeus full rest at home
 From many a toil and woe ;
 And rightly all things go ;
For how can one who seeth not the day
In bondage still to evils wear his life away ?

ANTISTROPHE I

For if with murderous cloud from Kentaur fierce
A subtle fate wrap all his stalwart frame,
 And the hot venom pierce,
Which Death begat and spotted dragon reared,
How can he hope to see the sun's bright flame,
Beyond to-day, by form fell, dark, and feared,
 Of Hydra done to death,
 While words of crafty breath
And deadly throbs of pain that seize and burn,
Caused by the swarth-maned monster, all his might o'er-
 turn ?

STROPHE II

 And she, (ah misery !)
Seeing a great evil to her home draw nigh

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Of marriage strange and new,
Hath failed to scan aright the things she knew,
And now has cause to mourn
The alien counsel of fell converse born ;
She pours, I trow, in fears,
A pelting rain of fast down-dropping tears ;
And coming Destiny
Unfolds a subtle, great calamity.

ANTISTROPHE II

The flood of tears flows fast ;
Sore evil spreads, like which in all the past
Ne'er from most hostile foe
Came on the son of Zeus far-famed, a woe
That well might move to tears.
O thou dark point of war's victorious spears,
Thou broughtest then yon bride,
Won where Œchalia soareth in its pride ;
And she of Kypros still.
In speechless might, is seen to work out Heaven's high
will.

947-1043

STROPHE I

Which calleth first for lament ?
What grief takes widest extent ?
Hard question this to decide for me in my measureless
woe !

ANTISTROPHE I

Some sorrows dwell with us near,
And some we await in our fear,
And the present and future alike in one common dreari-
ness flow.

STROPHE II

Ah ! would that some gale, blowing soft,
Would come on my hearth and my home,

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

And bear me away, far aloft,
Where never the terror might come,—
Terror that makes the life fail—
Of seeing the strong son of Zeus—
Yes, seeing him (so runs the tale)
In pain that none may unloose,
Come to his home, smitten low,
A marvel and portent of woe.

ANTISTROPHE II

Nearer—no longer from far,
I wail him as nightingale wails ;
The tread of strange footsteps I hear. . . .
But how is he brought ? As one fails,
Wrapt in his care for a friend,
To break the hush with his tread ;
So, voiceless, on him they attend :
Ah, shall I deem him as dead ?
Or may I hope that he lies,
Deep sleep closing his eyes ?

Hyllos

Ah, woe is me for thee, my father dear !
Woe, woe, for all my misery and fear !
What sorrow cometh next ?
What counsel can I find for soul perplexed ?

Elder

Hush, boy, hush ! lest thou stir
Thy sore vexed father's anguish dark and drear ;
He lives, in sleep laid low ;
Curb thou thy lips, no murmur let him hear.

Hyllos

What say'st thou ? Lives he still ?

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Elder

Thou wilt not rouse him now he slumbers sound
My child, nor stir his ill,
Nor bid it run its fierce, relentless round.

Hyllos

And yet my mind is vexed,
Brooding o'er sorrow, shaken and perplexed.

Heracles

O Zeus !

What spot on earth is this ?
Among what men am I ?
By pain that will not cease,
Worn out with agony ;
Ah, miserable me !

Again the accursèd venom gnaws through me.

Elder [to *Hyllos*]

Did'st thou not know what gain
It were to silence keep,
Nor banish from the eyes of one in pain
The dew of kindly sleep ?

Hyllos

And yet I know not how
To hold my peace, such pain beholding now.

Heracles

O ye Kenæan heights
Whereon mine altars stood,
What meed for holiest rites
Have ye wrought, and for good
Such outrage brought on me !
Would God I ne'er had cast on you mine eye,

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Nor lived to see
This crown of frenzied, unsoothed agony.
What minstrel apt to charm,
What leech with skilful arm,
Apart from Zeus, this pain could tranquil keep ?
(Wonder far off were that to gaze upon !)
Ah me ! but leave me, leave me yet to sleep,
Leave me to sleep, me, miserable one.
Where dost thou touch me ? Say,
Where lay to rest ?
Ah ! thou wilt slay me, slay :
What slumbered thou hast roused to life again ;
It seizes me, it creeps, this weary pain.
Where are ye, who, of all
That Hellas hers doth call,
Are found most evil, reckless of the right ?
For whom I wore my life,
In ceaseless, dreary strife,
Slaying by land and sea dread forms of might ;
Yet now to him who lies
In these sharp agonies,
Not one will bring the fire
Or sword, wherewith to work his heart's desire ;
And none will come and smite
His head to death's dark night,
And end his misery :
Ah me ! fie on you, fie.

Elder

Come, boy, thou son of him who lieth there,
Come thou and help, the work o'ertasketh me ;
Thine eye is young and clear ;
Thy vision more than mine to save and free.

THE MAIDENS OF TRACHIS

Hyllos

I lend my hand to lift ;
But neither from within, nor yet without,
May I a life forgetting pain work out ;
Zeus only gives that gift.

Heracles

Boy, boy ! where, where art thou ?
Come, lift me up ; yea, this way raise thou me.
Oh me ! O cursed Fates !
It leaps again, it leaps upon me now,
That scourge that desolates,
Fierce, stern, inexorable agony.
O Pallas, Pallas ! Now it bites again,
That bitter throb of pain :
Come, boy, in mercy smite
The father that begat thee ; draw thy sword,
Sword none will dare to blame :
Heal thou the evil plight
With which thy mother, sold to guilt abhorred,
Hath kindled all my wrath with this foul shame.
Ah, might I see her fallen even so,
As she hath brought me low !
O Hades, dear and sweet,
Brother of Zeus on high,
Smite me with quickest death-blow, I entreat,
And give me rest, give rest from this my misery !

AIAS

133-262

O SON of Telamon,
Who hast thine home in sea-girt Salamis,
Where the waves splash and moan,
I joy when all with thee goes well and right ;
But when the stroke of Zeus thy head doth smite,
Or from the Danaï evil rumour flies,
Spread far by enemies,
Then am I filled with dread, and, like a dove,
In fear and trembling move,
And glance with shuddering eyes.
And now this very night, its end just come,
Great sorrows on us press,
Hearing ill news, that thou
Hast rushed upon the meadow where they roam,
Our good steeds numberless,
And there hast slain the Danaï's treasured spoil,
All that was left us, won by war's sharp toil,
And dost destroy them now
With the keen, bright-edged sword.

Yea, such the gist of every whispered word
Odysseus now to each man's hearing brings,
And gains belief too well ;
For lo ! he tells of things
That now are found of thee too credible,
And every one that hears
Rejoiceth more than he who tells the tale,
And has but taunts and jeers
For all the sorrows that o'er thee prevail ;

AIAS

For if one takes his aim
 Against the great,
 He shall not fail, attacking their fair fame;
 But one who should relate
 Such tales of me would little credence gain;
 For envy still attends on high estate:
 And yet the poor but little may sustain,
 Weak tower and bulwark they,
 Who have not great and mighty men their stay;
 And still the great must own
 The poor and weak the best props of their throne.
 Yet men are slow to see,
 Senseless and blind, the truth of laws like these.
 And now, O king, on thee
 Such men pour idle clamour, as they please,
 And we are weak and frail,
 And without thee to ward them off we fail;
 But when thy form shall fill their souls with fear,
 As flocks of winged birds in fluttering haste,
 When swoops a vulture near,
 Raise din and chattering loud,
 So, should'st thou once appear,
 They too would crouch in dread, a dumb and voiceless
 crowd.

STROPHE

Yes, of a truth, the huntress Artemis,
 Daughter of Zeus, the wild bull bringing low,
 (O dark and evil fame!
 O mother of my shame!)
 She, she hath urged and driven thee on to this,
 Against the people's herds with sword to go.
 Was it for conquest whence she did not bear
 In war's success her share?
 Or was she tricked of gifts of glorious spoils,
 Or wild deer quarry, taken in the toils?

AIAS

Or was it Enyalios, brazen-clad,
 Brooding o'er fancied slight
For help in war whence he no booty had,
Who thus avenged his wrong in stratagems of night ?

ANTISTROPHE

For never else, O son of Telamon,
Had'st thou, from peace and healthy calmness driven,
 (Turning so far astray
 As these poor brutes to slay,)
To dark, sinister ill so madly gone !
It may be that this evil comes from Heaven ;
But Zeus and Phœbos, may they still avert
 The Argives' words of hurt !
But if the mighty kings, with evil will,
Spread tidings false, or, sunk in deepest ill,
That off-shoot of the stock of Sisypnos,
 Do not, O king, I pray,
Still by the waves in tents abiding thus,
Take to thy shame and mine the evil that they say.

EPODE

Rise from thy seat, arise,
Where all too long thou hast unmoved stayed on,
Kindling a woe that spreadeth to the skies,
While thy foes' haughty scorn its course doth run,
 With nothing to restrain,
As in a thicket when the wind blows fair ;
 And all take up the strain,
And tell of things that drive me to despair :
 For me is nought but pain.

Tecmessa

O men, who came to aid
Our Aias, ye who trace your ancient birth
To old Erectheus, sprung from out the earth,
 We who watch, half afraid,

A I A S

Far from his home, o'er Telamon's dear son,
Have cause enough to wail ;
Aias, the dread, strong, mighty to prevail,
Lies smitten low
By stormy blast of wild tempestuous woe.

Chorus

What trouble burdensome,
In place of peace and rest,
Hath the night to us brought ?
O thou from Phrygia come,
Child of Teleutas old,
Speak thou at our behest,
For Aias holds thee high in his esteem,
Prize of his prowess bold ;
And thou would'st speak not ignorant, I deem.

Tecmessa

Yet how can I speak aught
Of what with woe unspeakable is fraught ?
Dreadful and dark the things that thou wilt hear ;
For Aias in the night
Hath fallen in evil plight :
Yes he, the great, far-famed, sits raving there.
Such the dread sight would meet thy shrinking eyes
Within his tent,
His victims slaughtered, mangled, blood-besprent,
The hero's sacrifice.

Chorus

STROPHE

Ah me ! what news of fear
Of him, the man of spirit bright and keen,
Thou bringest to our ear,
Tidings we may not bear,
While yet no way of 'scaping them is seen,

AIAS

By the great Danai spread,
Which mighty Rumour swells to form more dread.
Ah me ! I fear, I fear,
What creepeth near and near ;
In sight of all men draws he nigh to death ;
For he with hand to frenzy turned aside,
And dark sword's edge hath slain,
The herds that roamed the plain
And keepers who were there the steeds to guide.

Tecmessa

Ah me ! 'Twas thence he rushed,
Dragging the flock of sheep as bound with chain ;
And some he stabbed until the blood outgushed,
And some with one sharp stroke he clove in twain ;
And, seizing two swift rams with white-woolled feet,
Of one he took the head and tore the tongue,
And both away he flung ;
The other to a column bound upright,
Taking his chariot's rein,
And with his double scourge that rings again,
Still more and more did smite,
Uttering foul words of shame,
Which never from a man, but from a demon came.

Chorus

ANTISTROPHE

Now it is time to hide
One's head beneath the shelter of the veil,
Or in the ships that glide,
Swiftly o'er ocean's tide,
On bench of rowers sitting swift to sail :
Such are the threats they fling,
The two Atreidæ, each a sovereign king,
Against me, and I dread
Lest I should lie there dead,
By fearful fate of stoning doomed to die,

A I A S

Sharing the woe of him our lord and friend,
 Whom shame and dark disgrace,
 That none may dare to face,
 As prisoner keep, and hold him to the end.

Tecmessa

Nay, it is so no more ;
 For as the swift South-west,
 That rushes on without the lightning-blaze,
 Soon lulls its tempest roar,
 So he is calm ; and now his care-worn breast
 Broods o'er new trouble, filled with sore amaze ;
 For to look out on ills ourselves have wrought,
 Which no hand else has brought,
 This of all grief and pain
 Is hardest to sustain.

348-427

Aias

STROPHE I

O sailors dear to me, my true friends still,
 Ye only faithful found,
 Ye see how o'er me waves of deadly ill
 Go surging round and round.

Chorus

Ah me ! Too well thou speakest all the truth.
 [*Aside.*] Yet his acts show how frenzied is his soul.

Aias

ANTISTROPHE I

O race of men who with my good ship sailed,
 Who came and plied the oar,
 Yet only have in trouble never failed ;
 Now slay me, I implore.

A I A S

Chorus

Hush, hush ! nor seek fresh ill on ill to pour,
Nor make the weight of sorrow more and more.

Aias

STROPHE II

Thou see'st the brave and bold,
(Fearless in fight was he,)
His prowess show on brute beasts of the field :
Ah me ! What scorn and outrage fall on me !

Tecmessa

Dear lord ! I pray thee, Aias, speak not thus.

Aias

Away ! Wilt thou not go ?
Away with thee ! . . . Woe, woe !

Tecmessa

Nay, by the Gods, be calm and yield to us.

Aias

O wretched fool, whose hands have failed to keep
My foe's accursèd brood,
And falling on horn'd kine and goodly sheep,
Poured out their purple blood !

Chorus

Why wilt thou grieve at what is past and done ?
These things can never be but as they are.

Aias

O thou, who spy'st out all,
Thou son of Lartios, tool for all things vile,
Of all the host to shame the meanest thrall,
For joy of heart, I trow, thou now wilt smile.

A I A S

Chorus

It is through God we all or smile or wail.

Aias

Ah ! might I see him near,
Sore vexèd though I be with grief and fear. . . .

Chorus

Hush thy rash speech. What ! See'st not where thou
art ?

Aias

O Zeus, my father's God ! Ah would that I,
Might on that scoundrel foe
And those two kings my vengeance work, and die
Myself by that same blow !

Tecmessa

When this thou prayest, pray for my death too.
Why should I care for life when thou art dead ?

Aias

STROPHE III

O dark that art my light !
O gloom that art to me supremely bright !
Oh, take me, I entreat,
Take me to dwell with you ; I am not meet
To look to Heaven's high race
For any helping grace,
Nor yet to men whose brief days swiftly fleet.
But She, the mighty One,
Daughter of Zeus on high,
With shameful contumely,
My life to death hath done.

AIAS

Where, where is room for flight ?
 Or whither roam and stay ?
 If evil day still follows evil night,
 And we are hunting for a madman's prey,
 Then should the whole host, hurling thrice strong spear,
 Smite me and slay me here.

Tecmessa

Ah misery ! That one so brave and good
 Should say the things he never dared before !

Aias

ANTISTROPHE III

O ye paths of the waves !
 Grove on the shore, and sea-encompassed caves !
 Long time ye held me bound,
 Imprisoned long, too long, on Troïa's ground,
 But now no longer—no,
 As long as life shall flow ;
 This let him know with whom is wisdom found ;
 And ye, O streams, that glide,
 Scamandros, murmuring near,
 Friend to the Argives dear,
 No longer at your side
 Shall ye this hero see,
 Of whom I dare proclaim,
 Though great the boast, that of all Hellenes he
 To Troïa came of mightiest name and fame ;
 But now, disgraced and whelmed with infamy,
 All helpless here I lie.

596-645

STROPHE I

O glorious Salamis !
 Thou dwellest where the salt waves hurl their sprays,
 Crowned with all brightest bliss,
 And all men own thee worthy of great praise ;

AIAS

And I (ah, wretched me !
The time is long since I abandoned thee)
In Ida staying still,
Or when the frost was chill,
Or when the grass was green upon the hill,
Through all the long, long months innumerable,
Here, worn with sorrow, dwell.

ANTISTROPHE I

And Aias with us still,
Stays as fresh foe, and difficult to heal,
Dwelling with frenzied ill ;
Whom thou of old did'st send with sword of steel,
Mighty in strife of war ;
And now, in dreary loneliness of soul,
To all his friends around
Great sorrow is he found ;
And deeds that did in noblest good abound,
With Atreus' sons, as deeds of foe to foe,
Are fallen, fallen low.

STROPHE II

Now of a truth outworn
With length of years,
In hoary age his mother loud shall mourn,
When she with bitter tears
Of that his frenzied mood shall hear the tale,
And weep, ah, well-a-day !
Nor will she utter wail
Like mourning nightingale,
That sadly sings in tone of mood distressed ;
But echoing hands shall smite upon her breast,
And she, her grey hair tearing, shall lament alway

ANTISTROPHE II

Far better did he lie
In Hades drear,

AIAS

Who is sore vexed, sore vexed with vanity,
 Who doth no more appear
 (Though boasting high descent in long array)
 Steadfast in temper true,
 But wanders far astray ;
 Ah, father, dark the day !
 So sad a tale awaits thee now to hear,
 Thy child's sore trouble, woe that none may bear,
 Which until now the sons of Æacos ne'er knew.

693-717

STROPHE

I thrill with eager delight,
 And with passionate joy I leap ;
 Io Pan ! Io Pan ! Io Pan !
 Come over the waves from the height
 Of the cliffs of Kyllene, where sweep
 The storm-blasts of snow in their might !
 Come, come, O King, at the head
 Of the dance of the Gods as they tread,
 That thou, with me, may'st twine
 The self-taught Nysian line,
 Or Knossian dance divine !
 Right well I now may dance :
 And o'er Icarian wave,
 Coming with will to save,
 May Delos' King, Apollo, gloriously advance !

ANTISTROPHE

Yes, the dark sorrow and pain,
 Far from me Ares hath set ;
 Io Pan ! Io Pan ! once more ;
 And now, O Zeus, yet again
 May our swift-sailing vessels be met
 By the dawn with clear light in its train.

AIAS

Our Aias from woe is released,
 And the wrath of the Gods hath appeased,
 And now, with holiest care,
 He offers reverent prayer.
 Ah, great Time nought will spare :
 Nought can I count as strange,
 Since, out of hopeless pain,
 Aias is calm again,
 Nor lets his fierce hot wrath against the Atreidæ range.

1185-1222

STROPHE I

When will they cease, the years,
 The long, long tale of years that come and go,
 Bringing their ceaseless fears,
 The toils of war that scatter woe on woe,
 Through Troïa's champaign wide,
 Reproach and shame to all the Hellenes' pride?

ANTISTROPHE I

Would that he first had trod
 The wide, vast Heaven, or Hades, home of all,
 Who erst the Hellenes showed
 The hateful strife where men in conflict fall !
 Ah, woes that woes begat !
 For he, yes he, hath made men desolate.

STROPHE II

Yes he, e'en he, hath made it mine
 To know nor joy of flowery wreaths,
 Nor deep cups flowing o'er with wine,
 Nor the sweet strain the soft flute breathes
 Nor yet (ah, woe ! ah, cursed spite !)
 The joy that crowns the livelong night.

Yes, he from love and all its joy
 Has cut me off, ah me ! ah me !

AIAS

And here I linger still in Troy,
By all uncared for, sad to see,
My hair still wet with dew and rain ;
Sad keepsake they from Troïa's plain !

ANTISTROPHE II

Till now from every fear by night,
And bulwark against darts of foe,
Aias stood forward in his might,
But now the stern God lays him low :
Ah me ! ah me ! What share have I,
Yea what, in mirth and revelry ?

Ah ! would that I my flight could take
Where o'er the sea the dark crags frown,
And on the rocks the wild waves break,
And woods the height of Sunion crown,
That so we might with welcome bless
Great Athens in her holiness !

PHILOCTETES

135-218

Chorus

STROPHE I

WHAT must I say or hide, O master dear,
In a strange land, myself a stranger here,
 To one who looks askance
 With shy, suspecting glance?
 Ever his skill excels
The counsel and the skill of other men,
 With whom the sceptre dwells
That Zeus bestows from heaven on those that reign.
 And now on thee, O boy,
Comes all this might of venerable days;
 Tell me then what employ
Thou bid'st me serve in, tending all thy ways.

Neoptolemos

Perchance thou fain would'st know
Where he in that remotest corner lies:
Take courage then, and hither turn thine eyes:
But when he comes, that traveller, with his bow
 Waking our fear
Then, from this cavern drawing back,
 As helper still be near,
And strive to serve me so that nothing lack.

Chorus

ANTISTROPHE I

Long since I cared for what thou bid'st me care,
To work out all that on thy need may bear;

PHILOCTETES

And now I pray thee tell
Where he may chance to dwell—
What region is his home?
Not out of season is it this to hear,
Lest he should subtly come,
And unawares fall on me here or there.
Say where does he abide,
What pathway does he travel to and fro?
Do his steps homeward glide,
Or does he tread the paths that outward go?

Neoptolemos

Thou see'st this cavern open at each end,
With chambers in the rock.

Chorus

And where is he, that sufferer, absent now?

Neoptolemos

To me it is full clear
That he in search for food his slow way wends,
Not far off now, but near;
For so, the rumour runs, his life he spends,
With swift-winged arrows smiting down his prey,
Wretched and wretchedly;
And none to him draws nigh,
With power to heal, and charm his grief away.

Chorus

STROPHE II

I pity him in truth,
How he with none to care of all that live,
With no face near that he has known in youth,
Still dwells alone where none may succour give,
Plagued with a plague full sore:
And as each chance comes on him, evermore
Wanders forth wretchedly,

PHILOCTETES

Ah me, how is't he still endures to live

In this his misery?

O struggles that the Gods to mortals give!

O miserable race,

Of those whose lives have failed to find the middle place!

ANTISTROPHE II

He, born of ancient sires,

And falling short of none that went before,

Now lies bereaved of all that life requires,

In lonely grief, none near him evermore,

Dwelling with dappled deer,

Or rough and grisly beasts, and called to bear

Both pain and hunger still;

Bearing sore weight of overwhelming ill,

Evil that none may heal,

And bitter wailing cry that doth its woe reveal.

Neoptolemos

Nought of all this is marvellous to me,

For, if my soul has any power to see,

These sufferings from the ruthless Chryse sent

Come with divine intent;

And all that now he bears

With no friend's loving cares,

It needs must be that still

It worketh a God's will,

That he the darts of Gods invincible

Should yet refrain from hurling against Troy

Till the full time is come,

When, as by fated doom,

(For thus it is they tell,)

It shall be his that city to destroy.

Chor. Hush, hush, boy.

Neop.

What means this?

PHILOCTETES

Chor. The heavy tread I hear,
As of a man who doth his sad life wear,
Somewhere, or here or there,
It falls, I say, it falls
Upon the listening sense,
That moan of one who, worn with anguish, crawls :
Those gasps of pain intense,
Heard from afar, to hide his anguish fail,
The groans he utters tell their own sad tale.
But now, boy . . .

Neop. What comes next ?

Chor. New counsels form and try ;
For now the man is not far off but nigh,
With no soft whispered sigh,
As shepherd with his reed,
Who through the meadow strays ;
But he or falling in sore stress of need,
Sharp cry of pain doth raise ;
Or he has seen our ship in harbour sail,
Strange sight ! and comes in fear our presence here to wail.

676-728

STROPHE I

I heard the story old,
Though never was it given me to behold,
How Cronos' mighty son
Bound on the wheel that still went whirling on,
The man who dared draw nigh
The holy marriage-bed of Zeus on high ;
But never heard I tell,
Or with mine eyes saw fate more dark and fell
Than that which this man bound,
Though he nor guilty of foul deeds was found,
Nor yet of broken trust,
But still was known as just among the just ;

PHILOCTETES

And now he perisheth
With this unlooked-for, undeserv'd death :
And wonder fills my soul,
How he, still listening to the surge's roll,
Had strength his life to bear,
Life where no moment came but brought a tear.

ANTISTROPHE I

Here where none near him came,
Himself his only neighbour, weak and lame,
None, in the island born,
Sharing his woe, to whom his soul might mourn,
With loud re-echoing cry,
The gnawing pains, the blood-fraught misery,—
Who might with herbs assuage
The gore that oozes, in its fevered rage,
From out his foot's sore wound,
(Should that ill seize him,) from the parent ground
Still gathering what was meet ;
And now this way, now that he dragged his feet,
Trailing his weary way,
(Like children, who, their nurse being absent, stray,)
Where any ease might be,
Whene'er his pain sore-vexing left him free.

STROPHE II

No food had he from out the sacred ground,
Nor aught of all we share,
Keen workers as we are,
Only what he with wing'd arrows found,
From his swift-darting bow.
O soul, worn down with woe !
That for ten years ne'er knew the wine-cup's taste,
But turning still his gaze
Where the pool stagnant stays,
Thither he aye his dreary pathway traced.

PHILOCTETES

ANTISTROPHE II

But now since he hath met with true-born son
Of men of valour, he
Shall rise up blest and free :
One who, in ship that o'er the sea had flown,
After long months hath come,
And leads him to his home,
Where nymphs of Melia dwell, and, bearing shield,
The hero oft hath trod,
Equal with Gods, a God,
Bright with Heaven's fire o'er Ceta's lofty field.

827-864

Chorus

O sleep, that know'st not pain !
O sleep, that know'st not care !
Would thou might'st come with blessed, balmy air,
And blessing long remain,
And from his eyes ward off the noon-tide blaze,
Now full upon him poured ;
Come as our Healer, Lord !
And thou, my son, look well to all thy ways ;
What next demands our thought ?
What now must needs be wrought ?
Thou see'st him ; and I ask
Why we delay our task ;
Occasion that still holds to counsel right,
With quickest speed appears as conqueror in the fight.

Neoptolemos

True, he indeed heareth nought, but yet I see that all vainly
We hunt after this man's bow, in good ship sailing
without him.
There is the crown of success, him the God bade us
bring with us ;
Sore shame were it now with lies to boast of a task still
unfinished.

PHILOCTETES

Chorus

ANTISTROPHE

This, boy, will God provide,
But when thou speak'st again,
Speak, boy, O speak in low and whispered strain;
Of those so sorely tried
Sleep is but sleepless, quick to glance and see;
But look with all thy skill,
What way to work thy will,
And gain that prize, yea that, all secretly.
Thou knowest whose we are,
And if his thoughts thou share,
Then may the men who see with clearest eyes,
Look out ahead for sore perplexities.

EPODE

Yes, boy, 'tis come, the hour;
Sightless the man lies there,
Stretched as in midnight's power,
No friend or helper near,
(Yea, sleep is sound and sweet
Beneath the noontide heat,)
And hath lost all command
Of limb, or foot, or hand,
But looks as one to Hades drawing nigh;
See to it that thou speakest seasonably:
Far as I search around
The toil that wakes no fear is still the noblest found.

1081-1169

Philoctetes

STROPHE I

O cave of hollow grot,
Now in the noontide hot,
Now cold with icy breath,
I may not then leave thee at any time,
But thou must still be with me e'en till death.

PHILOCTETES

Ah miserable me!
O dwelling fullest known
Of pain and wailing moan
From me, ah misery!
What now shall be my daily lot of life?
What hopes to me remain
My daily food to gain?
The timid birds will fly
Through the wild breezy sky;
For all my strength is vanished utterly.

Chorus

Thou, thou against thyself hast sentence passed,
O thou worn out and pained!
No spell of mightier Power is o'er thee cast,
For when thou mightest wisdom's path have gained,
Thou did'st, in wilful mood,
Prefer thine evil genius to the good.

Philoctetes

ANTISTROPHE I

Ah, worn with woe am I,
Worn out with misery,
Exposed to wanton scorn,
I in the years that come must pine away,
With no man near me, desolate, forlorn.
Ah me, ah, woe is me!
No longer wielding still,
In hands that once were strong,
My swift darts, can I hunger's cravings fill?
But crafty speech of meaning dark and wrong
Has subtly crept on me.
Oh, that I might but see
The man who planned this crime,
Sharing for equal time
The woe and pain that have been mine so long!

PHILOCTETES

Chorus

Fate was it, yea, 'twas Fate,
Fate of the Gods, no subtlety of guile,
That brought thy captive state;
Turn then on others all thy bitter hate,
Thy curses hard and vile;
I care at least for this,
That thou my proffered friendship should'st not miss.

Philoctetes

STROPHE II

Ah me, upon the shore,
Where the wild waters roar,
He sits and laughs at me,
And tosseth in his hand
What cheered my misery,
What ne'er till now another might command.
O bow, most dear to me,
Torn from these hands of mine,
If thou hast sense to see,
Thou lookest piteously
At this poor mate of thine,
The friend of Heracles,
Who never more shall wield thee as of old;
And thou, full ill at ease,
Art bent by hands of one for mischief bold,
All shameful deeds beholding,
Deeds of fierce wrath and hate,
And thousand evils from base thoughts unfolding,
Which none till now had ever dared to perpetrate.

Chorus

It is a man's true part,
Of what is just to speak with words of good;
But, having eased his heart,
Not to launch forth his speech of bitter mood.

PHILOCTETES

He was but one, urged on
By many to their will,
And for his friends hath won
A common help against a sore and pressing ill.

Philoctetes

ANTISTROPHE II

O wingèd birds that fly
Through the clear, open sky,
O tribes, whose eyes gleam bright,
Of beasts that roam the hills,
No more will ye in flight
Forth from my dwelling draw me at your will;
For I no more possess
The might I had of old
(Ah me for my distress !)
In those fierce weapons bold ;
But now, with little care
This place is guarded against dreadest ill,
And none need now beware.
Come ye, 'tis now your hour to feast at will;
On me your vengeance wreaking,
This livid flesh devour :
I soon shall fail ; for who, life's nurture seeking,
Can live on air, deprived of all earth's kind fields pour ?

Chorus

Nay, by the Gods, if still
Aught can thy feeling quicken for a friend,
Draw near, with all good will,
To one who fain his steps to thee would bend ;
But know, yea, know full well,
'Tis thine to end this woe.
Sad is't our ills to swell,
While they, in myriad forms, around us ever grow.

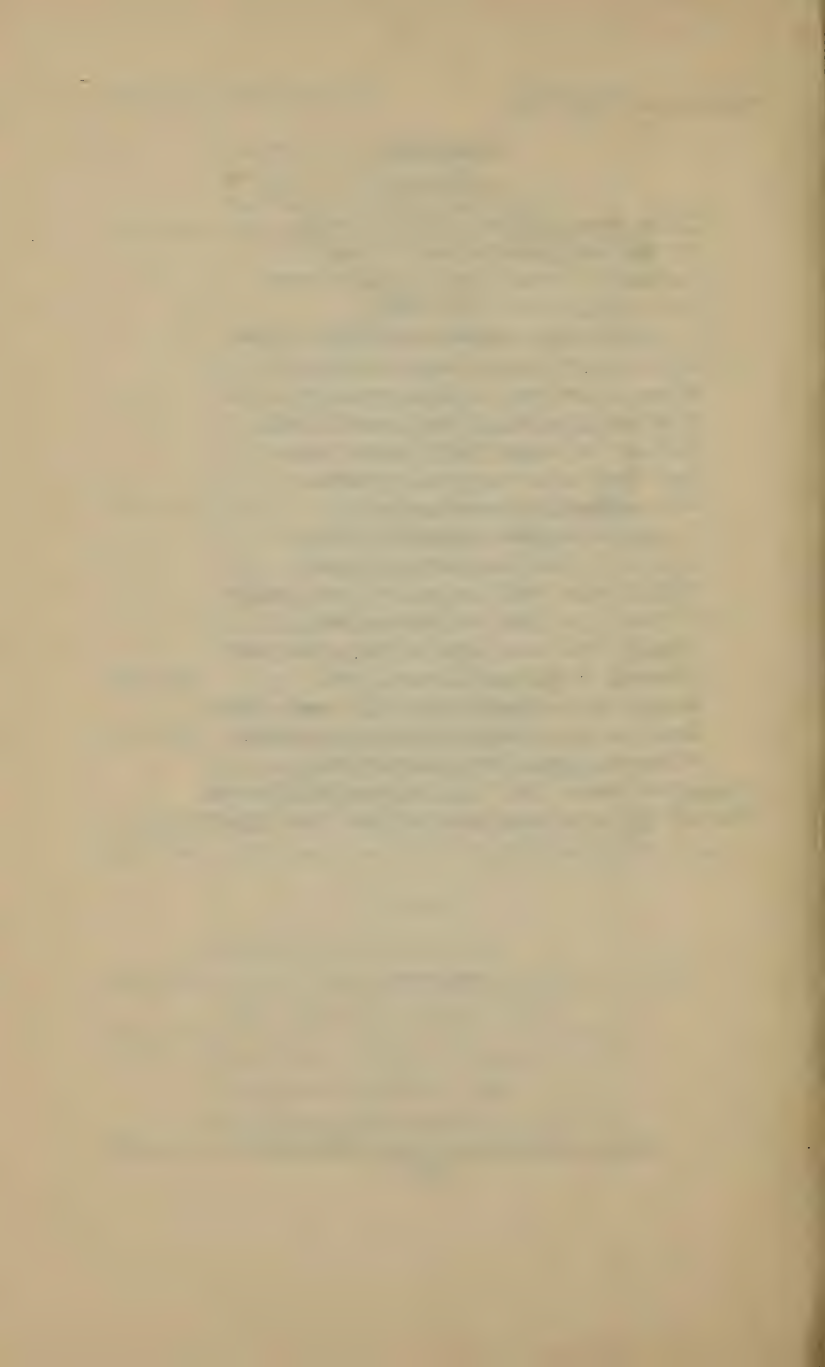
PHILOCTETES

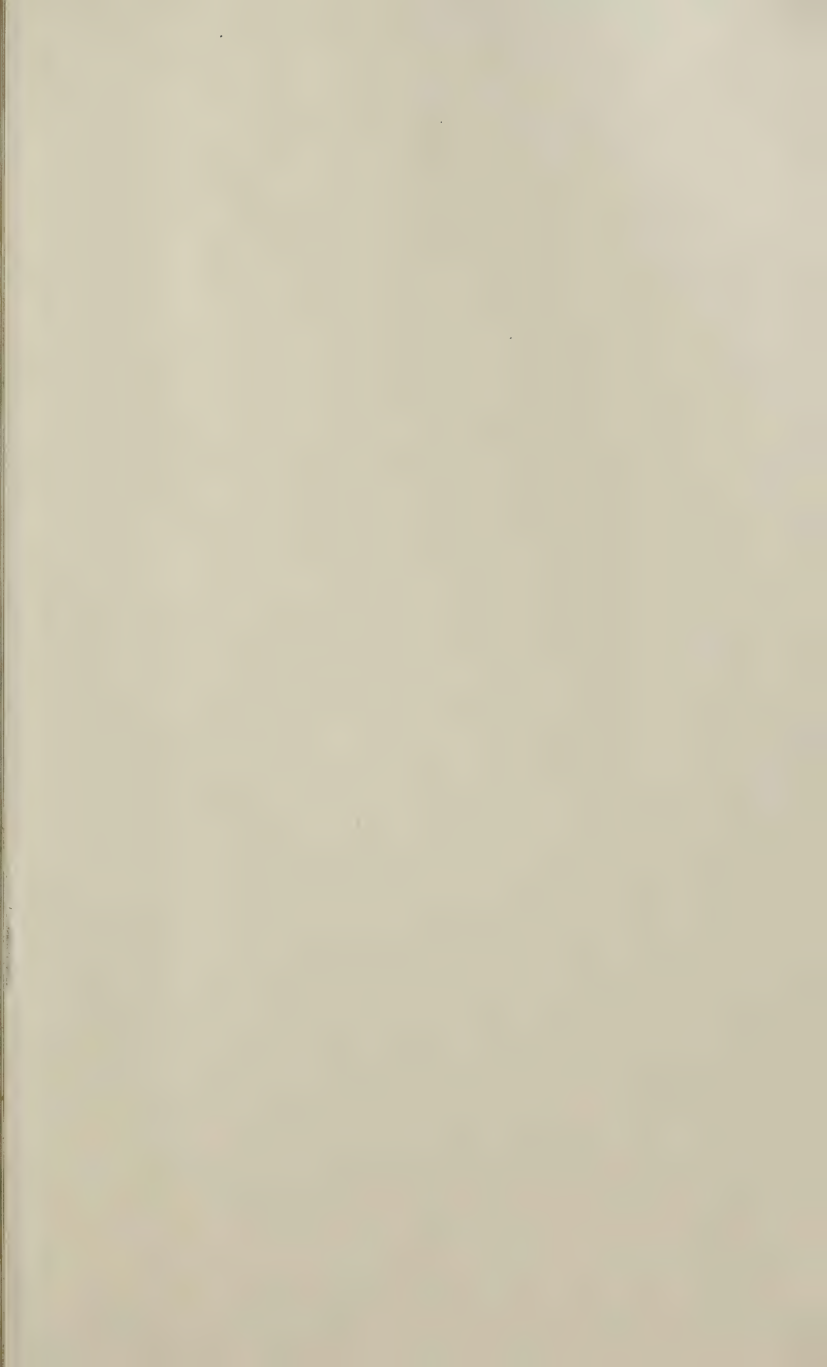
1452-1468

Philoctetes

352
Come, then, and let us bid farewell
To this lone island where I dwell:
Farewell, O home that still did'st keep
Due vigil o'er me in my sleep;
Ye nymphs by stream or wood that roam;
Thou mighty voice of ocean's foam,
Where oftentimes my head was wet
With drivings of the South wind's fret;
And oft the mount that Hermes owns
Sent forth its answer to my groans,
The wailing loud as echo given
To me by tempest-storms sore driven;
And ye, O fountains clear and cool,
Thou Lykian well, the wolves' own pool—
We leave you, yea, we leave at last,
Though small our hope in long years past:
Farewell, O plain of Lemnos' isle,
Around whose coasts the bright waves smile,
Send me with prosperous voyage and fair
Where the great Destinies may bear,
Counsel of friends, and God supreme in Heaven,
Who all this lot of ours hath well and wisely given.

THE END





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